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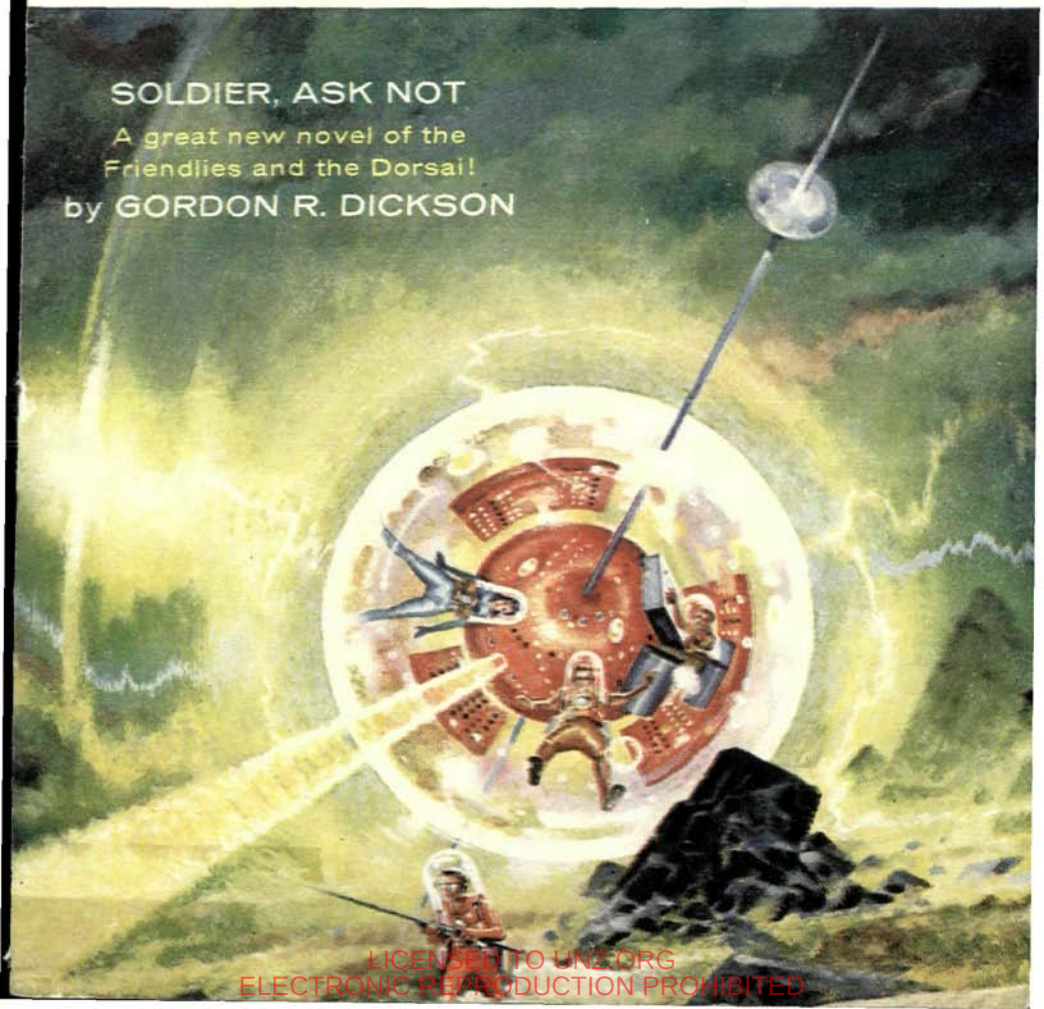
THE 1980 PRESIDENT by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD



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ALL STORIES NEW

Galaxy
MAGAZINE

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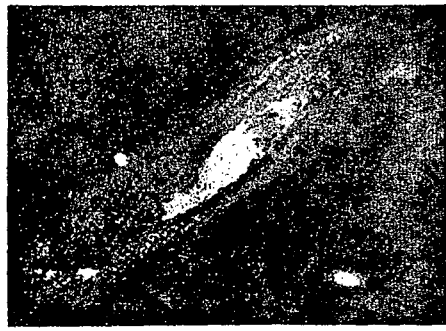

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SEEING STARS

There are lights in the sky at night — and not all of them are stars. Every once in a while something else wheels into view — a nova, a long-period comet, a hatch of meteorites — to brighten up our night-time sky and give us something changeable and fresh to look at. This September particularly there are a couple of objects on display which you don't usually find, no matter how hard you look.

For instance, did you ever see an asteroid with the naked eye?

With a little luck, you just might be able to see one around September 2d. It is the worldlet Vesta, a 240-mile-diameter boulder, third largest of the thousands of chunks of rock we call the asteroid belt. (About 50,000, to be more precise — 1600 known and catalogued, and a lot that aren't.) You may never have thought of an asteroid as a naked-eye object, and indeed the other 49,999 aren't. But Vesta is not only big, it is for some unknown reason particularly bright. Every once in a while it makes a specially close approach to the Earth, and then it comes right up to the threshhold of vision.

If you'd like to test your sharpness of eye on Vesta, here's how: First, make sure it's a clear night. (At its brightest Vesta reaches just a hair above 6th magnitude, which is usually considered the lower limit for bare-eye viewing.) Second, locate the constellation Aquarius.

The usual way to locate

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These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

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Aquarius is first to find the North Star. Then draw from it an imaginary line, slightly curved, sweeping south and a touch westward through Cassiopeia and the Great Square in Pegasus until you come to Aquarius.

That's the usual way. Fortunately, this year it is a little easier. The planet Saturn happens to be stagnating in Aquarius right now, exhibiting that retrograde motion that so puzzled the epicyclists; so if you look toward the south in the late evening the brightest object you see is probably Saturn, and the stars around it are the constellation you want, Aquarius. Well, a few degrees southeast of Saturn you should, the fates being with you, find a *very* faint object; and if you watch it for a couple of evenings, and it moves, or changes its appearance, or disappears entirely, you will then know you have had a naked-eye sighting of the asteroid Vesta.

Almost equally difficult to see — but not because it isn't bright — is the planet Mercury.

Considering that it is a first-magnitude object, it is surprising that so few people have seen it with the naked eye — or, at least, recognized what they have seen. The trouble, of course, is that the little devil lies so close to the sun that most of the time when Mercury is in the sky, it is unfortunately a daylight sky. A couple of times a year, for a day or two at a time, we have a fighting chance to find it. This year's best remaining chance occurs in the early mornings around September 19th.

Your first step is to get out of bed at least an hour before sunrise. Find a spot with an unobstructed view to the east, and look in that direction. You will surely see a very bright object, fairly high in the sky. Ignore it. It isn't Mercury, it is Venus. But below Venus, low on the horizon just before the sky begins to brighten, you should be able to spot another — lesser, but still bright — object; and that is what you are looking for.

Find it? Then consider yourself one up on, for example, Copernicus — who spent all his life looking for Mercury, but was never able to find it at all. (He had the misfortune to spend most of his life in areas with considerable ground fog, it seems.) Seeing Vesta, on the other hand, puts you one up not only on Copernicus but on every other astronomer who lived from Eratosthenes to Olbers, who discovered it about a hundred and fifty odd years ago. But Olbers cheated. He used a telescope.

— FREDERIK POHL

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SOLDIER, ASK NOT

by GORDON R. DICKSON

Illustrated by MORROW

The star-born "splinter races" of Man were coming home again, to meet on a battered planet where men faced Dorsai!

Soldier, ask not — now or ever —
Where to war your banners go . . .

I

As I got off the spaceliner on St. Marie, the little breeze from the higher pressure of the ship's atmosphere at my back was like a hand from the darkness behind me, shoving me into the dark day and the rain. My Newsman's cloak covered me. The wet chill of the day wrapped around me but did not enter me. I was like the naked claymore of my own early ancestors, wrapped and hidden in the plaid

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— sharpened on a stone — and carried now at last to the meeting for which it had been guarded over three years of waiting.

A meeting in the cold rain of spring. I felt it, cold as old blood on my hands and tasteless on my lips. Above, the sky was low and clouds flowing to the east. The rain fell steadily.

The sound of it was like a rolling of drums as I went down the outside landing stairs, the multitude of raindrops sounding their own end against the unyielding concrete all around. The concrete stretched far from the ship in every direction, hiding the earth, as bare and clean as the last page of an account book before the final entry. At its far edge, the spaceport terminal stood like a single gravestone. The curtains of falling water between it and me thinned and thickened like the smoke of battle, but could not hide it entirely from my sight.

It was the same rain that falls in all places and on all worlds. It had fallen like this on Athens of Old Earth, when I was only a boy, on the dark, unhappy house of the uncle who brought me up after my parent's death, on the ruins of the Parthenon as I saw it from my bedroom window.

I listened to it now as I went down the landing stairs, drumming on the great ship behind me which had shifted me free between the stars — from Old Earth to this second smallest of the worlds, this small terraformed planet under the Procyon suns — and drumming hollowly upon the Credentials case sliding down the conveyor belt beside me. That case now meant nothing to me — neither my papers or the Credentials of Impartiality I had carried six years and worked so long to earn. Now I thought less of these than of the name of the man I should find dispatching groundcars at the edge of the field. If, that was, he was actually the man my Earth informants had named to me. And if they had not lied . . .

". . . Your luggage, sir?"

I woke from my thoughts and the rain. I had reached the concrete. The debarking officer smiled at me. He was older than I, though he looked younger. As he smiled some beads of moisture broke and spilled like tears from the brown visor-edge of his cap onto the tally sheet he held.

"Send it to the Friendly compound," I said. "I'll take the Credentials case."

I took it up from the conveyor belt and turned to walk off. The man standing in a dispatcher's uniform by the first groundcar in line did fit the description.

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"Name, sir?" he said. "Business on St. Marie?"

If he had been described to me, I must have been described to him. But I was prepared to humor him.

"Tam Olyn," I said. "Old Earth resident and Interworld News Network representative. I'm here to cover the Friendly-Exotic conflict." I opened my case and gave him my papers.

"Fine, Mr. Olyn." He handed them back to me, damp from the rain. He turned away to open the door of the car beside him and set the automatic pilot. "Follow the highway straight to Joseph's Town. Put it on automatic at the city limits and the car'll take you to the Friendly compound."

"All right," I said. "Just a minute."

He turned back. He had a young, good-looking face with a little mustache and he looked at me with a bright blankness. "Sir?"

"Help me get in the car."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir." He came quickly over to me. "I didn't realize your leg—"

"Damp stiffens it," I said. He adjusted the seat and I got my left leg in behind the steering column. He started to turn away.

"Wait a minute," I said again. I was out of patience. "You're Walter Imera, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," he said softly.

"Look at me," I said. "You've got some information for me, haven't you?"

He turned slowly back to face me. His face was still blank.

"No, sir."

I waited a long moment, looking at him.

"All right," I said then, reaching for the car door. "I guess you know I'll get the information anyway. And they'll believe you told me."

His little mustache began to look like it was painted on.

"Wait—" he said.

"What for?"

"Look," he said, "you've got to understand. Information like that's not part of your news, is it? I've got a family—"

"And I haven't," I said. I felt nothing for him.

"But you don't understand. They'd kill me. That's the sort of organization the Blue Front is now, here on St. Marie. What d'you want to know about them for? I didn't understand you meant—"

"All right," I said. I reached for the car door.

"Wait—" He held out a hand to me in the rain. "How do I know you can make them leave me alone if I tell you?"

"They may be back in power here some day," I said. "Not even outlawed political groups

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want to antagonize the Interplanetary News Network." I started to close the door once more.

"All right—" he said quickly. "All right. You go to New San Marcos. The Wallace Street Jewelers there. It's just beyond Joseph's Town, where the Friendly compound is you're going to." He licked his lips. "You'll tell them about me?"

"I'll tell them." I looked at him. Above the edge of the blue uniform collar on the right side of his neck I could see an inch or two of fine silver chain, bright against winter-pale skin. The crucifix attached to it would be down under his shirt. "The Friendly soldiers have been here two years now. How do people like them?"

He grinned a little. His color was coming back.

"Oh, like anybody," he said. "You just have to understand them. They've got their own ways."

I felt the ache in my stiff leg where the doctors on New Earth had taken the needle from the spring rifle out of it three years before.

"Yes, they have," I said. "Shut the door."

He shut it. I drove off.

There was a St. Christopher's medal on the car's instrument panel. One of the Friendly soldiers would have ripped it off and thrown it away, or refused the car. And so it gave me a particular pleasure to leave it where it was, though it meant no more to me than it would to him. It was, not just because of Dave, my brother-in-law, and the other prisoners they had shot down on New Earth. It was simply because there are some duties that have a small element of pleasure. After the illusions of childhood are gone and there is nothing left but duties, such pleasures are welcome. Fanatics, when all is said and done, are no worse than mad dogs.

But mad dogs have to be destroyed; it is a simple common sense.

And you return to common sense after a while in life, inevitably. When the wild dreams of justice and progress are all dead and buried, when the painful beatings of feeling inside you are finally stilled, then it becomes best to be still, unliving, and unyielding as—the blade of a sword sharpened on a stone. The rain through which such a blade is carried to its using does not stain it, any more than the blood in which it is bathed at last. Rain and blood are alike to sharpened iron.

I drove for half an hour past wooded hills and plowed mead-

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ows. The furrows of the fields were black in the rain. I thought it a kinder black than some other shades I had seen; and at last I reached the outskirts of Joseph's Town.

The autopilot of the car threaded me through a small, neat, typical St. Marie City of about a hundred thousand people. We came out on the far side into a cleared area, beyond which lifted the massive, sloping concrete walls of a military compound.

A Friendly non-com stopped my car at the gate with his black spring rifle, and opened the car door at my left.

"Thee have business here?"

His voice was harsh and high in his nose. The cloth tabs of a groupman edged his collar. Above them his forty-year-old face was lean and graven with lines. Both face and hands, the only uncovered parts of him, looked unnaturally white against the black cloth and rifle.

I opened the case beside me and handed him my papers.

"My Credentials," I said. "I'm here to see your acting Commander of Expeditionary Forces, Commandant Jamethon Black."

"Move over, then," he said nasally. "I must drive thee."

I moved.

He got in and took the stick. We drove through the gate and turned down an approach alley. I could see an interior square at the alley's far end. The close concrete walls on either side of us echoed the sound of our passage as we went. I heard drill commands growing louder as we approached the square. When we rolled out into it, soldiers were drawn up in ranks for their midday service, in the rain.

The groupman left me and went in the entrance of what seemed to be an office inset in the wall on one side of the square. I looked over the soldiers standing in formation. They stood at present-arms, their position of worship under field conditions; and as I watched, the officer standing facing them, with his back to a wall, led them into the words of their Battle Hymn.

> Soldier, ask not — now or ever,
> Where to war your banners go.
> Anarch's legions, all surround us.
> Strike! And do not count the blow!

I sat trying not to listen. There was no musical accompaniment, no religious furniture or symbols except the thin shape of the cross whitewashed on the gray wall behind the officer. The massed male voices rose and fell slowly in the dark, sad hymn that promised them only pain, and suffering, and sorrow. At last, the final line mourned its harsh prayer for

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a battle death, and they ordered arms.

A groupman dismissed the ranks as the officer walked back past my car without looking at me, and passed in through the entrance where my non-commissioned guide had disappeared. As he passed I saw the officer was young.

A moment later the guide came for me. Limping a little on my stiffened leg, I followed him to an inner room with the lights on above a single desk. The young officer rose and nodded as the door closed behind me. He wore the faded tabs of a commandant on his uniform lapels.

As I handed my credentials across the desk to him, the glare of the light over the desk came full in my eyes, blinding me. I stepped back and blinked at his blurred face. As it came back into focus I saw it for a moment as if it was older, harsher, twisted and engraved with the lines of years of fanaticism.

Then my eyes refocused completely, and I saw him as he actually was. Dark-faced, but thin with the thinness of youth rather than that of self-starvation. He was not the face burned in my memory. His features were regular to the point of being handsome, his eyes tired and shadowed; and I saw the straight, weary line of his mouth above the still, self-controlled stiffness of his body, smaller and slighter than mine.

He held the credentials without looking at them. His mouth quirked a little, dryly and wearily, at the corners. "And no doubt, Mr. Olyn," he said, "you've got another pocket filled with authorities from the Exotic Worlds to interview the mercenary soldiers and officers they've hired from the Dorsai and a dozen other worlds to oppose God's Chosen in War?"

I smiled. Because it was good to find him as strong as that, to add to my pleasure of breaking him.

II

I looked across the ten feet or so of distance that separated us. The Friendly non-com who had killed the prisoners on New Earth had also spoken of God's Chosen.

"If you'll look under the papers directed to you," I said, "you'll find them. The News Network and its people are impartial. We don't take sides."

"Right," said the dark young face opposing me, "takes sides."

"Yes, Commandant," I said. "That's right. Only sometimes it's a matter of debate where Right is. You and your troops here now are invaders on the

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world of a planetary system your ancestors never colonized. And opposing you are mercenary troops hired by two worlds that not only belong under the Procyon suns but have a commitment to defend the smaller worlds of their system—of which St. Marie is one. I'm not sure right *is* on your side."

He shook his head slightly and said, "We expect small understanding from those not Chosen." He transferred his gaze from me to the papers in his hand.

"Mind if I sit down?" I said. "I've got a bad leg."

"By all means." He nodded to a chair beside his desk and, as I sat down, seated himself. I looked across the papers on the desk before him and saw, standing to one side, the solidograph of one of the windowless high-peaked churches the Friendlies build. It was a legitimate token for him to own—but there just happened to be three people, an older man and woman and a young girl of about fourteen, in the foreground of the image. All three of them bore a family resemblance to Jamethon Black. Glancing up from my credentials he saw me looking at them; and his gaze shifted momentarily to the graph and away again, as if he would protect it.

"I'm required, I see," he said, drawing my eyes back to him, "to provide you with cooperation and facilities. We'll find quarters for you here. Do you need a car and driver?"

"Thanks," I said. "That commercial car outside will do. And I'll manage my own driving."

"As you like." He detached the papers directed to him, passed the rest back to me and leaned toward a grill in his desktop. "Groupman."

"Sir," the grill answered promptly.

"Quarters for a single male civilian. Parking assignment for a civilian vehicle, personnel."

"Sir."

The voice from the grill clicked off. Jamethon Black looked across his desk at me. I got the idea he was waiting for my departure.

"Commandant," I said, putting my credentials back in their case, "two years ago your Elders of the United Churches on Harmony and Association found the planetary government of St. Marie in default of certain disputed balances of credit, so they sent an expedition in here to occupy and enforce payment. Of that expedition, how much in the way of men and equipment do you have left?"

"That, Mr. Olyn," he said, "is restricted military information."

"However—" and I closed the case — "you, with the regular

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rank of commandant, are acting Commander of Forces for that remnants of your expedition. That position calls for someone about five ranks higher than you. Do you expect such an officer to arrive and take charge?"

"I'm afraid you'd have to ask that question of Headquarters on Harmony, Mr. Olyn."

"Do you expect reinforcements of personnel and more supplies?"

"If I did—" his voice was level —"I would have to consider that restricted information, too."

"You know that it's been pretty widely mentioned that your General Staff on Harmony has decided that this expedition to St. Marie is a lost cause? But that to avoid loss of face they prefer you here to be cut up, instead of withdrawing you and your men."

"I see," he said.

"You wouldn't care to comment?"

His dark, young, expressionless face did not change. "Not in the case of rumors, Mr. Olyn."

"One last question then. Do you plan to retreat westward, or surrender when the spring offensive of the Exotic mercenary forces begins to move against you?"

"The Chosen in War never retreat," he said. "Neither do they abandon, or suffer abandonment by, their Brothers in the Lord." He stood up. "I have work I must get back to, Mr. Olyn."

I stood up, too. I was taller than he was, older, and heavier-boned. It was only his almost unnatural composure that enabled him to maintain his appearance of being my equal or better.

"I'll talk to you later, perhaps, when you've got more time," I said.

"Certainly." I heard the office door open behind me. "Groupman," he said, speaking past me, "take care of Mr. Olyn."

The groupman he had turned me over to found me a small concrete cubicle with a single high window, a camp bed and a uniform cabinet. He left me for a moment and returned with a signed pass.

"Thanks," I said as I took it. "Where do I find the Headquarters of the Exotic Forces?"

"Our latest advices, sir," he said, "is that they're ninety kilometers east of here. New San Marcos." He was my height, but, like most of them, half a dozen years younger than I, with an innocence that contrasted with the strange air of control they all had.

"San Marcos." I looked at him. "I suppose you enlisted men know your General Headquarters on Harmony has decided against wasting replacements for you?"

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"No, sir," he said. I might have commented on the rain for all the reaction he showed. Even these boys were still strong and unbroken. "Is there somewhat else?"

"No," I said. "Thanks."

He went out. And I went out, to get in my car and head ninety kilometers east through the same sort of country to New San Marcos. I reached it in about three-quarters of an hour. But I did not go directly to find the Exotic Field Headquarters. I had other fish to fry.

These took me to the Wallace Street Jewelers. There, three shallow steps down from street level and an opaqued door let me in to a long, dim-lighted room filled with glass cases. There was a small elderly man at the back of the store behind the final case and I saw him eyeing my correspondent's cloak and badge as I got closer.

"Sir?" he said, as I stopped across the case from him. He raised gray, narrow old eyes in a strangely smooth face to look at me.

"I think you know what I represent," I said. "All worlds know the News Services. We're not concerned with local politics."

"Sir?"

"You'll find out how I learned your address anyway," I kept on smiling at him. "So I'll tell you it was from a spaceport auto-dispatcher named Imera. I promised him protection for telling me. We'd appreciate it if he remains well and whole."

"I'm afraid—" He put his hands on the glass top of the case. They were veined with the years. "You wanted to buy something?"

"I'm willing to pay in good will," I said, "for information."

His hands slid off the counter-top.

"Sir." He sighed a little. "I'm afraid you're in the wrong store."

"I'm sure I am," I said. "But your store'll have to do. We'll pretend it's the right store and I'm talking to someone who's a member of the Blue Front."

He shook his head slowly and stepped back from the case.

"The Blue Front is illegal," he said. "Good-by, sir."

"In a moment. I've got a few things to say first."

"Then I'm sorry." He retreated toward some drapes covering a doorway. "I can't listen. No one will come into this room with you, sir, as long as you talk like that."

He slipped through the drapes and was gone. I looked around the long, empty room.

"Well," I said, a little more loudly, "I guess I'll have to speak to the walls. I'm sure the walls can hear me."

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I paused. There was no sound.

"All right," I said. "I'm a correspondent. All I'm interested in is information. Our assessment of the military situation here on St. Marie—" and here I told the truth—"shows the Friendly Expeditionary Forces abandoned by their home headquarters and certain to be overrun by the Exotic Forces as soon as the ground dries enough for heavy equipment to move."

There was still no answer, but the back of my neck knew they were listening, and watching me.

"As a result," I went on—and here I lied, though they would have no way of knowing—"we consider it inevitable that the Friendly Command here will have got in contact with the Blue Front. Assassination of enemy commanders is expressly in violation of the Mercenaries' Code and the Articles of Civilized Warfare—but civilians could do what soldiers could not."

Still there was no sound or movement beyond the drapes.

"A news representative," I said, "carries Credentials of Impartiality. You know how highly these are held. I only want to ask a few questions. And the answers will be kept confidential . . ."

For a last time I waited, and there was still no answer. I turned and went up the long room and out. It was not until I was well out on to the street that I let the feeling of triumph within spread out and warm me.

They would take the bait. People of their sort always did. I found my car and drove to Exotic Headquarters.

These were outside the town. There a mercenary commandant named Janol Marat took me in charge. He conducted me to the bubble structure of their HQ building. There was a feel of purpose, there, a sure and cheerful air of activity. They were well armed, well trained. After the Friendlies it jumped at me. I said so to Janol.

"We've got a Dorsai Commander and we outnumber the opposition." He grinned at me. He had a deeply tanned, long face that went into deep creases as his lips curved up. "That makes everybody pretty optimistic. Besides, our commander gets promoted if he wins. Back to the Exotics and staff rank—out of field combat for good. It's good business for us to win."

I laughed and he laughed.

"Tell me more, though," I said. "I want reasons I can use in the stories I send back to News Network."

"Well—" he answered the snappy salute of a passing group-

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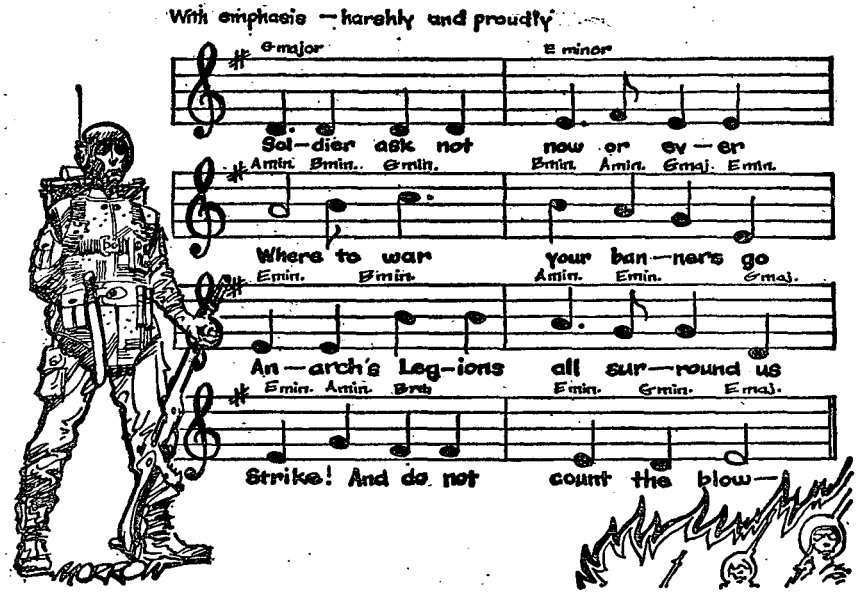

man, a Cassidan, by the look of him — "I guess you might mention the usual—the fact our Exotic employers don't permit themselves to use violence and consequently they're always rather generous than otherwise when it comes to paying for men and equipment. And the Out-Bond—that's the Exotic Ambassador to St. Marie, you know—"

"I know."

"He replaced the former Out-Bond here three years ago. Anyway, he's something special, even for someone from Mara or Kultis. He's an expert in ontogenic calculations. If that means much to you. It's all over my head." Janol pointed. "Here's the Field Commander's office. He's Kensie Graeme."

"Graeme?" I said, frowning. I had spent a day at the Hague looking up Kensie Graeme before I came, but I wanted Janol's reactions to him. "Sounds familiar." We approached the office building. "Graeme . . ."

"You're probably thinking of another member of the same family." Janol took the bait. "Donal Graeme. A nephew. The one who pulled that wild stunt not long ago, attacking Newton with just a handful of Freiland ships. Kensie is Donal's uncle. Not as spectacular as the young Graeme, but I'll bet you'll like him better than you would the

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nephew. Kensie's got two men's likeableness." He looked at me, grinning slightly again.

"That supposed to mean something special?" I said.

"That's right," said Janol. "His own likeableness and his twin brother's, too. Meet Ian Graeme sometime when you're in Blauvain. That's where the Exotic embassy is, east of here. Ian's a dark man."

We walked into the office.

"I can't get used," I said, "to how so many Dorsai seem related."

"Neither can I. Actually, I guess it's because there really aren't so many of them. The Dorsai's a small world, and those that live more than a few years—" Janol stopped by a commandant sitting at a desk. "Can we see the Old Man, Hari? This is a News Network man."

"Why, I guess so." The other looked at his desk signal board. "The OutBonds with him, but he's just leaving now. Go on in."

Janol led me between the desks. A door at the back of the room opened before we reached it and a calm-faced man of middle age wearing a blue robe and close-cropped white hair came out. He looked strange but not ridiculous—particularly after you met his odd, hazel-colored eyes.

He was an Exotic.

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I knew of Padma, as I knew the Exotics. I had seen them on their own home worlds of Mara and Kultis. A people committed to non-violence, mystics but very practical mystics, masters of what were known as the "strange sciences"—a dozen wizardic step-children of early psychology, sociology and the humanistic fields of research.

"Sir," said Janol to Padma, "this is—"

"Tam Olyn. I know," said Padma softly. He smiled up at me, and those eyes of his seemed to catch light for a moment and blind me. "I was sorry to learn about your brother-in-law, Tam."

I went quite cool all over. I had been ready to walk on, but now I stood stock still and looked at him.

"My brother-in-law?" I said.

"The young man who died near Castlemain, on New Earth."

"Oh, yes," I said, between stiff lips. "I'm surprised that you'd know."

"I know because of you, Tam." Once more the hazel eyes of Padma seemed to catch light. "We have a science called ontogenics, by which we calculate the probabilities of human actions in present and future situations. You've been an important factor in those calculations for some time." He smiled. "That's why I was expecting to meet you here, and now. We've calculated you into our present situation here on St. Marie, Tam."

"Have you?" I said. "Have you? That's interesting."

"I thought it would be," said Padma softly. "To you, especially. Someone like a newsman, like yourself, would find it interesting."

"It is," I said. "It sounds like you know more than I do about what I'm going to be doing here."

"We've got calculations," said Padma in his soft voice, "to that effect. Come see me in Blauvain, Tam; and I'll show you."

"I'll do that," I said.

"You'll be very welcome." Padma inclined his head. His blue robe whispered on the floor as he turned, and went out of the room.

"This way," said Janol, touching my elbow. I started as if I had just wakened from a deep sleep. "The commander's in here."

I followed him automatically into a further office. The individual I had come to see stood up as we came through the door. He was a great, lean man in field uniform, with a heavy-boned, but open, smiling face under black, slightly curly hair. A sort of golden warmth of personality—a strange thing in a Dorsai—seemed to flow out from him as

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he rose to meet me and his long-fingered, powerful hand swallowed mine in a handshake.

"Come on in," he said. "Let me fix you up with a drink. Janol," he added to my mercenary commandant from New Earth, "no need for you to stick around. Go on to chow. And tell the rest of them in the outer office to knock off."

Janol saluted and went. I sat down as Graeme turned to a small bar cabinet behind his desk. And for the first time in three years, under the magic of the unusual fighting man opposite me, a little peace came into my soul. With someone like this on my side, I could not lose.

III

"Credentials?" asked Graeme, as soon as we were settled with drinks of Dorsai whisky—which is a fine whisky—in our hands.

I passed my papers over. He glanced through them, picking out the letters from Sayona, the Bond of Kultis, to "*Commander — St. Marie Field Forces.*" He looked these over and put them aside. He handed me back the credentials folder.

"You stopped at Joseph's Town first?" he said.

I nodded. I saw him looking at my face, and his own sobered.

"You don't like the Friendlies," he said.

His words took my breath away. I had come prepared to fence for an opening to tell him. It was too sudden. I looked away.

I did not dare answer right away. I could not. There was either too much or too little to say if I let it come out without thinking. Then I got a grip on myself.

"If I do anything at all with the rest of my life," I said, slowly, "it'll be to do everything in my power to remove the Friendlies and all they stand for from the community of civilized human beings."

I looked back up at him. He was sitting with one massive elbow on his desktop, watching me.

"That's a pretty harsh point of view, isn't it?"

"No harsher than theirs."

"Do you think so?" he said seriously. "I wouldn't say so."

"I thought," I said, "you were the one who was fighting them."

"Why, yes." He smiled a little. "But we're soldiers on both sides."

"I don't think they think that way."

He shook his head a little.

"What makes you say that?" he said.

"I've seen them," I answered. "I got caught up front in the

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lines on Castlemain on New Earth, three years ago." I tapped my stiff knee. "I got shot and I couldn't navigate. The Cassidans around me began to retreat—they were mercenaries, and the troops opposing them were Friendlies hired out as mercenaries."

I stopped and took a drink of the whisky. When I took the glass away, Graeme had not moved. He sat as if waiting.

"There was young Cassidan, a buck soldier," I said. "I was doing a series on the campaign from an individual point of view. I'd picked him for my individual. It was a natural choice. You see—" I drank again, and emptied the glass—"my younger sister went out on contract as an accountant to Cassida two years before that, and she'd married him. He was my brother-in-law."

Graeme took the glass from my hand and silently replenished it.

"He wasn't actually a military man," I said. "He was studying shift mechanics and he had about three years to go. But he stood low on one of the competitive examinations at a time when Cassida owed a contractual balance of troops to New Earth." I took a deep breath. "Well, to make a long story short, he ended up on New Earth in this same campaign I was covering. Because of the series I was writing, he was assigned to me. We both thought it was a good deal for him, that he'd be safer that way."

I drank some more of the whisky.

"But," I said, "you know, there's always a better story a little deeper in the combat zone. We got caught up front one day when the New Earth troops were retreating. I picked up a needle through the kneecap. The Friendly armor was moving up and things were getting hot. The soldiers around us took off toward the rear in a hurry, but Dave tried to carry me, because he thought the Friendly armor would fry me before they had time to notice I was a non-combatant. Well," I took another deep breath, "the Friendly ground troops caught us. They took us to a sort of clearing where they had a lot of prisoners and kept us there for a while. Then a groupman—one of their fanatic types, a tall, starved-looking soldier about my age—came up with orders they were to reform for a fresh attack."

I stopped and took another drink. But I could not taste it.

"That meant they couldn't spare men to guard the prisoners. They'd have to turn them loose back of the Friendly lines. The

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Groupman said that wouldn't work. They'd have to make sure the prisoners couldn't endanger them."

Graeme was still watching me.

"I didn't understand. I didn't even catch on when the other Friendlies — none of them were non-coms like the Groupman — objected." I put my glass on the desk beside me and stared at the wall of the office, seeing it all over again, as plainly as if I looked through a window at it. "I remember how the Groupman pulled himself up straight. I saw his eyes. As if he'd been insulted by the others, objecting.

" '*Are they Chosen of God?*' " he shouted at them. '*Are they of the Chosen?*' "

I looked across at Kensie Graeme and saw him still motionless, still watching me, his own glass small in one big hand.

"You understand?" I said to him. "as if because the prisoners weren't Friendlies, they weren't quite human. As if they were some lower order it was all right to kill." I shook, suddenly. "And he did it! I sat there against a tree, safe because of my News Correspondent's uniform and watched him shoot them down. All of them. I sat there and looked at Dave, and he looked at me, sitting there, as the Groupman shot him!"

I quit all at once. I hadn't meant to have it all come out like that. It was just that I'd been able to tell no one who would understand how helpless I had been. But something about Graeme had given me the idea he would understand.

"Yes," he said after a moment, and took and filled my glass again. "That sort of thing's very bad. Was the Groupman found and tried under the Mercenaries Code?"

"After it was too late, yes."

He nodded and looked past me at the wall. "They aren't all like that, of course."

"There's enough to give them a reputation for it."

"Unfortunately, yes. Well" — he smiled slightly at me — "we'll try and keep that sort of thing out of this campaign."

"Tell me something," I said, putting my glass down. "Does that sort of thing — as you put it — ever happen to the Friendlies, themselves?"

Something took place then in the atmosphere of the room. There was a little pause before he answered. I felt my heart beat slowly, three times, as I waited for him to speak.

He said at last, "No, it doesn't."

"Why not?" I said.

The feeling in the room became stronger. And I realized I had gone too fast. I had been

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sitting talking to him as a man and forgetting what else he was. Now I began to forget that he was a man and become conscious of him as a Dorsai — an individual as human as I was, but trained all his life, and bred down the generations to a difference. He did not move or change the tone of his voice, or any such thing; but somehow he seemed to move off some distance from me, up into a higher, colder, stonier land into which I could venture only at my peril.

I remembered what was said about his people from that small, cold stony-mountained world: that if the Dorsai chose to withdraw their fighting men from the services of all the other worlds, and challenge those other worlds, not the combined might of the rest of civilization could stand against them. I had never really believed that before. I had never even really thought much about it. But sitting there just then, because of what was happening in the room, suddenly it became real to me. I could feel the knowledge, cold as a wind blowing on me off a glacier, that it was true; and then he answered my question.

"Because," said Kensie Graeme, "anything like that is specifically prohibited by Article Two of the Mercenaries' Code."

Then he broke out abruptly into a smile and what I had just felt in the room withdrew. I breathed again.

"Well," he said, putting his glass down empty on the desk, "how about joining us in the Officers' Mess for something to eat?"

I had dinner with them and the meal was very pleasant. They wanted to put me up for the night — but I could feel myself being pulled back to that cold, joyless compound near Joseph's Town, where all that waited for me was a sort of cold and bitter satisfaction at being among my enemies.

I went back.

It was about eleven p.m. when I drove through the gate of the compound and parked, just as a figure came out of the entrance to Jamethon's headquarters. The square was dim-lighted with only a few spotlights about the walls, their light lost in the rain-wet pavement. For a moment I did not recognize the figure — and then I saw it was Jamethon.

He would have passed by me at some little distance, but I got out of my car and went to meet him. He stopped when I stepped in front of him.

"Mr. Olyn," he said evenly. In the darkness I could not make out the expression of his face.

"I've got a question to ask,"

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I said, smiling in the darkness. "It's late for questions."

"This won't take long." I strained to catch the look on his face, but it was all in shadow. "I've been visiting the Exotic camp. Their commander's a Dorsai. I suppose you know that?"

"Yes." I could barely see the movement of his lips.

"We got to talking. A question came up and I thought I'd ask you, Commandant. Do you ever order your men to kill prisoners?"

An odd, short silence came between us. Then he answered.

"The killing or abuse of prisoners of war," he said without emotion, "is forbidden by Article Two of the Mercenaries' Code."

"But you aren't Mercenaries here, are you? You're native troops in service to your own True Church and Elders."

"Mr. Olyn," he said, while I still strained without success to make out the expression of his shadowed face — and it seemed that the words came slowly, though the tone of the voice that spoke them remained as calm as ever, "My Lord has set me to be His servant and a leader among men of war. In neither of those tasks will I fail Him."

And with that he turned, his face still shadowed and hidden from me, and passed around me and went on.

Alone, I went back inside to my quarters, undressed and lay down on the hard and narrow bed they had given me. The rain outside had stopped at last. Through my open, unglazed window I could see a few stars showing.

I lay there getting ready to sleep and making mental notes on what I would need to do tomorrow. The meeting with Padma the OutBond had jolted me sharply. I took his so-called calculations of human actions with reservation — but I had been shaken to learn of them. I would have to find out more about how much his science of ontogenics knew and could predict. If necessary, from Padma himself. But I would start first with ordinary reference sources.

No one, I thought, would ordinarily entertain the fantastic thought that one man like myself could destroy a culture involving the populations of two worlds. No one, except perhaps a Padma. What I knew, he with his calculations might have discovered. And that was that the Friendly worlds of Harmony and Association were facing a decision that would mean life or death to their way of living. A very small thing could tip the scales they weighed on.

For there was a new wind blowing between the stars.

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Four hundred years before we had all been men of Earth — Old Earth, the mother planet which was my native soil. One people.

Then, with the movement out to new worlds, the human race had "splintered", to use an Exotic term. Every small social fragment and psychological type had drawn apart by itself, and joined others like it and progressed toward specialized types. Until we had half a dozen fragments of human types — the warrior on the Dorsai, the philosopher on the Exotic worlds, the hard scientist on Newton, Cassida and Venus, and so forth . . .

Isolation had bred specific types. Then a growing intercommunication between the younger worlds, now established, and an ever-increasing rate of technological advance had forced specialization. The trade between the worlds was the trade of skilled minds. Generals from the Dorsai were worth their exchange rate in psychiatrists from the Exotics. Communications men like myself from Old Earth bought spaceship designers from Cassida. And so it had been for the last hundred years.

But now the worlds were drifting together. Economics was fusing the race into one whole, again. And the struggle on each world was to gain the advantages of that fusion while holding on to as much as possible of their own ways.

Compromise was necessary — and the harsh, stiff-necked Friendly religion forbade compromise and had made many enemies. Already public opinion moved against the Friendlies on other worlds. Discredit them, smear them, publicly here in this campaign and they would not be able to hire out their soldiers. They would lose the balance of trade they needed to hire the skilled specialists trained by the special facilities of other worlds, and which they needed to keep their own two poor-in-natural-resources worlds alive. They would die.

As young Dave had died. Slowly. In the dark.

. . . In the darkness now, as I thought of it, it rose up before me once again. It had been only noon when we were taken prisoner, but by the time the Groupman came with his orders for our guards to move up, the sun was almost down.

After they left, after it was all over and I was left alone, I crawled to the bodies in the clearing. And I found Dave among them; and he was not quite gone.

He was wounded in the body and I could not stop the bleeding.

It would not have helped if I

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had, they told me afterwards. But then it seemed that it would have. So I tried. But finally I gave up and by that time it was quite dark. I only held him and did not know he was dead until he began to grow cold. And then was when I had begun to change into what my uncle had always tried to make me. I felt myself die inside. Dave and my sister were to have been my family, the only family I had ever had hopes of keeping. Instead, I could only sit there in the darkness, holding him and hearing the blood from his red-soaked clothing, falling drop by drop, slowly on the dead variform oak leaves beneath us.

I lay there now in the Friendly compound, not able to sleep and remembering. And after a while I heard the soldiers marching, forming in the square for midnight service.

I lay on my back, listening to them. Their marching feet stopped at last. The single window of my room was over my bed — high in the wall against which the left side of my cot was set. It was unglazed and the night air with its sounds came freely through it along with the dim light from the square which painted a pale rectangle on the opposite wall of my room. I lay watching that rectangle and listening to the service outside; and I heard the duty officer lead them in a prayer for worthiness. After that they sang their battle hymn again, and I lay hearing it, this time, all the way through.

Soldier, ask not — now, or ever,
Where to war your banners go.
Anarch's legions all surround us.
Strike — and do not count the bow.

Glory, honor — praise and profit,
Are but toys of tinsel worth.
Render up your work, unasking,
Leave the human clay to earth.

Blood and sorrow — pain unending,
Are the portion of us all.
Grasp the naked sword, opposing.
Gladly in the battle fall.

So shall we, anointed soldiers,
Stand at last before the Throne.
Baptized in our wounds, red-flowing,
Sealed unto our Lord — alone!

After that they dispersed to cots no different from mine.

I lay there listening to the silence in the square and the measured dripping of a rain-spout outside by my window, its slow drops falling after the rain, one by one, uncounted in the darkness.

IV

After the day I landed, there was no more rain. Day by day the fields dried. Soon they would be firm underneath the weight of heavy surface-war

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equipment, and everyone knew that then the Exotic spring offensive would get under way. Meanwhile both Exotic and Friendly troops were in training.

During the next few weeks, I was busy about my newswork. Mostly feature and small stories on the soldiers and the native people. I had dispatches to send and I sent them faithfully. A correspondent is only as good as his contacts; I made contacts everywhere but among the Friendly troops. These remained aloof, though I talked to many of them. They refused to show fear or doubt.

I had heard these Friendly soldiers were generally undertrained because the suicidal tactics of their officers kept their ranks always filled with green replacements. But the ones here were the remnants of an Expeditionary Force six times their present numbers. They were all veterans, though most of them were in their teens. Only here and there, among the non-coms, and more often among the commissioned officers, I saw the prototype of the non-com who had ordered the prisoners shot on New Earth. Here, the men of this type looked like rabid, gray wolves mixed among polite, well-schooled young dogs just out of puppyhood.

It was a temptation to think that they alone were what I had set out to destroy.

To fight that temptation I told myself that Alexander the Great had led expeditions against the hill tribes and ruled in Pella, capital of Macedonia, and ordered men put to death when he was sixteen. But still the Friendly soldiers looked young to me. I could not help contrasting them with the adult, experienced mercenaries in Kensie Graeme's forces. For the Exotics, in obedience to their principles, would hire no drafted troops or soldiers who were not in uniform of their own free will.

Meanwhile I had heard no word from the Blue Front. But by the time two weeks had gone, I had my own connections in New San Marcos, and at the beginning of the third week one of these brought me word that the jewelers shop in Wallace Street there had closed its door — had pulled its blinds and emptied the long room of stock and fixtures, and moved or gone out of business. That was all I needed to know.

For the next few days, I stayed in the vicinity of Jamethon Black himself, and by the end of the week my watching him paid off.

At ten o'clock that Friday night I was up on a catwalk just above my quarters and

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under the sentry-walk of the walls, watching as three civilians with Blue Front written all over them drove into the square, got out and went into Jamethon's office.

They stayed a little over an hour. When they left, I went back down to bed. That night I slept soundly.

The next morning I got up early, and there was mail for me. A message had come by spaceliner from the director of News Network back on Earth, personally congratulating me on my dispatches. Once, three years before, this would have meant a great deal to me. Now, I only worried that they would decide I had made the situation here newsworthy enough to require extra people being sent out to help me. I could not risk having other news personnel here now to see what I was doing.

I got in my car and headed east along the highway to New San Marcos and the Exotic Headquarters. The Friendly troops were already out in the field; eighteen kilometers east of Joseph's Town, I was stopped by a squad of five young soldiers with no non-com over them. They recognized me.

"In God's name, Mr. Olyn," said the first one to reach my car, bending down to speak to

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me through the open window at my left shoulder. "You cannot go through."

"Mind if I ask why?" I said.

He turned and pointed out and down into a little valley between two wooded hills at our left.

"Tactical survey in progress."

I looked. The little valley or meadow was perhaps a hundred yards wide between the wooded slopes, and it wound away from me and curved to disappear to my right. At the edge of the wooded slopes where they met open meadow, there were lilac bushs with blossoms several days old. The meadow itself was green and fair with the young chartreuse grass of early summer and the white and purple of the lilacs, and the variform oaks behind the lilacs were fuzzy in outline, with small, new leaves.

In the middle of all this, in the center of the meadow, were black-clad figures moving about with computing devices, measuring and figuring the possibilities of death from every angle. In the very center of the meadow for some reason they had set up marking stakes — a single stake, then a stake in front of that with two stakes on either side of it, and one more stake in line before these. Farther on was another single stake, down, as if fallen on the grass and discarded.

I looked back up into the lean young face of the soldier.

"Getting ready to defeat the Exotics?" I said.

He took it as if it had been a straightforward question, with no irony in my voice at all.

"Yes sir," he said seriously. I looked at him and at the taut skin and clear eyes of the rest.

"Ever think you might lose?"

"No, Mr. Olyn." He shook his head solemnly. "No man loses who goes to battle for the Lord." He saw that I needed to be convinced, and he went about it earnestly. "He hath set His hand upon His soldiers. And all that is possible to them is victory — or sometimes death. And what is death?"

He looked to his fellow soldiers and they all nodded.

"What is death?" they echoed.

I looked at them. They stood there asking me and each other what was death as if they were talking about some hard but necessary job.

I had an answer for them, but I did not say it. Death was a Groupman, one of their own kind, giving orders to soldiers just like themselves to assassinate prisoners. That was death.

"Call an officer," I said. "My pass lets me through here."

"I regret, sir," said the one who had been talking to me. "We cannot leave our posts to sum-

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mon an officer. One will come soon."

I had a hunch what "soon" meant, and I was right. It was high noon before a Force Leader came by to order them to chow and let me through.

As I pulled into Kensie Graeme's Headquarters, the sun was low, patterning the ground with the long shadows of trees. Yet it was as if the camp was just waking up. I did not need experience to see the Exotics were beginning to move at last against Jamethon.

I found Janol Marat, the New Earth commandant.

"I've got to see Field Commander Graeme," I said.

He shook his head, for all that we now knew each other well.

"Not now, Tam. I'm sorry."

"Janol," I said, "this isn't for an interview. It's a matter of life and death. I mean that. I've got to see Kensie."

He stared at me. I stared back.

"Wait here," he said. We were standing just inside the headquarters office. He went out and was gone for perhaps five minutes. I stood, listening to the wall clock ticking away. Then he came back.

"This way," he said.

He led me outside and back between the bubble roundness of the plastic buildings to a small structure half-hidden in some trees. When we stepped through its front entrance, I realized it was Kensie's personal quarters. We passed through a small sitting room into a combination bedroom and bath. Kensie had just stepped out of the shower and was getting into battle clothes. He looked at me curiously, then turned his gaze back on Janol.

"All right, Commandant," he said, "you can get back to your duties, now."

"Sir," said Janol, without looking at me.

He saluted and left.

"All right, Tam," Kensie said, pulling on a pair of uniform slacks. "What is it?"

"I know you're ready to move out," I said.

He looked at me a little humorously as he locked the waistband of his slacks. He had not yet put on his shirt, and in that relatively small room he loomed like a giant, like some irresistible natural force. His body was tanned like dark wood and the muscles lay in flat bands across his chest and shoulders. His belly was hollow and the cords in his arms came and went as he moved them. Once more I felt the particular, special element of the Dorsai in him. It was not just his physical size and strength. It was not even the fact that he

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was someone trained from birth to war, someone bred for battle. No, it was something living but untouchable — the same quality of difference to be found in the pure Exotic like Padma the Out-Bond, or in some Newtonian or Cassidan researchist. Something so much above and beyond the common form of man that it was like a serenity, a sense of conviction where his own type of thing was concerned that was so complete it made him beyond all weaknesses, untouchable, unconquerable.

I saw the slight, dark shadow of Jamethon Black in my mind's eye, standing opposed to such a man as this; and the thought of any victory for Jamethon was unthinkable, an impossibility.

But there was always danger.

"All right, I'll tell you what I came about," I said to Kensie. "I've just found out Black's been in touch with the Blue Front, a native terrorist political group with its headquarters in Blauvain. Three of them visited him last night. I saw them."

Kensie picked up his shirt and slid a long arm into one sleeve.

"I know," he said.

I stared at him.

"Don't you understand?" I said. "They're assassins. It's their stock in trade. And the one man they and Jamethon Black both could use out of the way is you."

He put his other arm in a sleeve.

"I know that," he said. "They want the present government here on St. Marie out of the way and themselves in power — which isn't possible with Exotic money hiring us to keep the peace here."

"They haven't had Jamethon Black's help."

"Have they got it now?" he asked, sealing the shirt closure between thumb and forefinger.

"The Friendlies are desperate," I said. "Even if reinforcements arrived tomorrow, Jamethon knows what his chances are with you ready to move. Assassins may be outlawed by the Conventions of War and the Mercenaries' Code, but you and I know the Friendlies."

Kensie looked at me oddly and picked up his jacket.

"Do we?" he said.

I met his eyes. "Don't we?"

"Tam." He put on the jacket and closed it. "I know the men I have to fight. It's my business to know. But what makes you think you know them?"

"They're my business too," I said. "Maybe you'd forgotten. I'm a newsman. People are my business, first, last and always."

"But you've got no use for the Friendlies."

"Should I?" I said. "I've been on all the worlds. I've seen the Cetan entrepreneur — and he

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wants his margin, but he's a human being. I've seen the Newtonian and the Cassidan with their heads in the clouds, but if you yanked on their sleeves hard enough, you could pull them back to reality. I've seen Exotics like Padma at their mental parlor tricks, and the Freilander up to his ears in his own red tape. I've seen them from my own world of Old Earth, and Coby, and Venus and even from the Dorsai, like you. And I tell you they've all got one thing in common. Underneath it all they're human. Every one of them's human — they've just specialized in some one, valuable way."

"And the Friendlies haven't?"

"Fascinaticism," I said. "Is that valuable? It's just the opposite. What's good — what's even permissible about blind, deaf, dumb, unthinking faith that doesn't let a man reason for himself?"

"How do you know they don't reason?" Kensie asked. He was standing facing me now.

"Maybe some of them do," I said. "Maybe the young ones, before the poison's had time to work in. What good does that do, as long as the culture exists?"

A sudden silence came into the room.

"What are you talking about?" said Kensie.

"I mean you want the assassins," I said. "You don't want the Friendly troops. Prove that Jamethon Black has broken the Conventions of War by arranging with them to kill you; and you can win St. Marie for the Exotics without firing a shot."

"And how would I do that?"

"Use me," I said. "I've got a pipeline to the political group the assassins represent. Let me go to them as your representative and outbid Jamethon. You can offer them recognition by the present government, now. Padma and the present St. Marie government heads would have to back you up if you could clean the planet of Friendlies that easily."

He looked at me with no expression at all.

"And what would I be supposed to buy with this?" he said.

"Sworn testimony they'd been hired to assassinate you. As many of them as needed could testify."

"No Court of Interplanetary Inquiry would believe people like that," Kensie said.

"Ah," I said, and I could not help smiling. "But they'd believe me as a News Network Representative when I backed up every word that was said."

There was a new silence. His face had no expression at all.

"I see," he said.

He walked past me into the salon. I followed him. He went

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to his phone, put his finger on a stud and spoke into an imageless, gray screen.

"Janol," he said.

He turned away from the screen, crossed the room to an arms cabinet and began putting on his battle harness. He moved deliberately and neither looked nor spoke in my direction. After a few long minutes, the building entrance slid aside and Janol stepped in.

"Sir?" said the Freilander officer.

"Mr. Olyn stays here until further orders."

"Yes sir," said Janol.

Graeme went out.

I stood numb, staring at the entrance through which he had left. I could not believe that he would violate the Conventions so far himself as not only to disregard me, but to put me essentially under arrest to keep me from doing anything further about the situation.

I turned to Janol. He was looking at me with a sort of wry sympathy on his long, brown face.

"Is the OutBond here in camp?" I asked him.

"No." He came up to me. "He's back in the Exotic Embassy in Blauvain. Be a good fella now and sit down, why don't you? We might as well kill the next few hours pleasantly."

We were standing face to face; I hit him in the stomach.

I had done a little boxing as an undergraduate on the college level. I mention this not to make myself out a sort of muscular hero, but to explain why I had sense enough not to try for his jaw. Graeme could probably have found the knockout point there without even thinking, but I was no Dorsai. The area below a man's breastbone is relatively large, soft, handy and generally just fine for amateurs. And I did know something about how to punch.

For all that, Janol was not knocked out. He went over on the floor and lay there doubled up with his eyes still open. But he was not ready to get up right away. I turned and went quickly out of the building.

The camp was busy. Nobody stopped me. I got back into my car, and five minutes later I was free on the darkening road for Blauvain.

V

From New San Marcos to Blauvain and Padma's Embassy was fourteen hundred kilometers. I should have made it in six hours, but a bridge was washed out and I took fourteen.

It was after eight the following morning when I burst into the

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half-park, half-building that was the embassy.

"Padma—" I said. "Is he still—"

"Yes, Mr. Olyn," said the girl receptionist. "He's expecting you."

She smiled above her purple robe. I did not mind. I was too busy being glad Padma had not already taken off for the fringe areas of the conflict.

She took me down and around a corner and turned me over to a young male Exotic, who introduced himself as one of Padma's secretaries. He took me a short distance and introduced me to another secretary, a middle-aged man this time, who led me through several rooms and then directed me down a long corridor and around a corner, beyond which he said was the entrance to the office area where Padma worked at the moment. Then he left me.

I followed his direction. But when I stepped through that entrance it was not into a room, but into a further short corridor. And I checked, stopping myself dead. For what I suddenly thought I saw coming at me was Kensie Graeme—Kensie with murder on his mind.

But the man who looked like Kensie merely glanced at me and dismissed me, continuing to come on. Then I knew.

Of course, he was not Kensie. He was Kensie's twin brother, Ian, commander of Garrison Forces for the Exotics, here in Blauvain. He strode on toward me; and I began once more to walk toward him, but the shock stayed with me until we had passed one another.

I do not think anyone could have come on him like that, in my position and not been hit the same way. From Janol, at different times, I had gathered how Ian was the converse of Kensie. Not in a military sense—they were both magnificent specimens of Dorsai officers—but in the matter of their individual natures.

Kensie had had a profound effect on me from the first moment, with his cheerful nature and the warmth of being that at times obscured the very fact that he was a Dorsai. When the pressure of military affairs was not directly on him he seemed all sunshine; you could warm yourself in his presence as you might in the sun. Ian, his physical duplicate, striding toward me like some two-eyed Odin, was all shadow.

Here at last was the Dorsai legend come to life. Here was the grim man with the iron heart and the dark and solitary soul. In the powerful fortress of his body, what was essentially Ian dwelt as

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isolated as a hermit on a mountain. He was the fierce and lonely Highlandman of his distant ancestry, come to life again.

Not law, not ethics, but the trust of the given word, clan-loyalty and the duty of the blood feud held sway in Ian. He was a man who would cross hell to pay a debt for good or ill; and in that moment when I saw him coming toward me and recognized him at last, I suddenly thanked whatever gods were left, that he had no debt with me.

Then we had passed each other, and he was gone around a corner.

Rumor had it, I remembered then, that the blackness around him never lightened except in Kensie's presence. That he was truly his twin brother's other half. And that if he should ever lost the light that Kensie's bright presence shed on him, he would be doomed to his own lightlessness forever.

It was a statement I was to remember at a later time, as I was to remember seeing him come toward me in that moment.

But now I forgot him as I went forward through another entrance into what looked like a small conservatory and saw the gentle face and short-cropped white hair of Padma, the OutBond, wearing a pale yellow robe.

"Come in, Mr. Olyn," he said, getting up. "And come along with me."

He turned and walked out through an archway of purple clematis blooms. I followed him, and found a small courtyard, all but filled with the elliptical shape of a sedan aircar. Padma was already climbing into one of the seats facing the controls. He held the door for me.

"Where are we going?" I asked as I got in.

He touched the autopilot panel; the ship rose in the air. He left it to its own navigation, and pivoted his chair about to face me.

"To Commander Graeme's headquarters in the field," he answered.

His eyes were a light hazel color, but they seemed to catch and swim with the sunlight striking through the transparent top of the aircar, as we reached altitude and began to move horizontally. I could not read them, or the expression on his face.

"I see," I said. "Of course, I know a call from Graeme's HQ could get to you much faster than I could by groundcar from the same spot. But I hope you aren't thinking of having him kidnap me or something like that. I have Credentials of Impartiality protecting me as a Newsman, as well as authoriza-

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tions from both the Friendly and the Exotic worlds. And I don't intend to be held responsible for any conclusions drawn by Graeme after the conversation the two of us had earlier this morning — *alone*."

Padma sat still in his aircar seat, facing me. His hands were folded in his lap together, pale against the yellow robe, but with strong sinews showing under the skin of their backs.

"You're coming with me now by my decision, not Kensie Graeme's."

"I want to know why," I said tensely.

"Because," he said slowly, "you are very dangerous." And he sat still, looking at me with unwavering eyes.

I waited for him to go on, but he did not. "Dangerous?" I said. "Dangerous to who?"

"To the future of all of us."

I stared at him, then I laughed. I was angry.

"Cut it out!" I said.

He shook his head slowly, his eyes never leaving my face. I was baffled by those eyes. Innocent and open as a child's, but I could not see through them into the man himself.

"All right," I said. "Tell me, why am I dangerous?"

"Because you want to destroy a race of people. And you know how."

There was a short silence. The aircar fled on through the skies without a sound.

"Now that's an odd notion," I said slowly and calmly. "I wonder where you got it?"

"From our ontogenic calculations," said Padma, as calmly as I had spoken. "And it's not a notion, Tam. As you know yourself."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Ontogenics. I was going to look that up."

"You did look it up, didn't you, Tam?"

"Did I?" I said. "I guess I did, at that. It didn't seem very clear to me, though, as I remember. Something about evolution."

"Ontogenics," said Padma, "is the study of the effect of evolution upon the interacting forces of human society."

"Am I an interacting force?"

"At the moment and for the past several years, yes," said Padma. "And possibly for some years into the future. But possibly not."

"That sounds almost like a threat."

"In a sense it is." Padma's eyes caught the light as I watched them. "You're capable of destroying yourself as well as others."

"I'd hate to do that."

"Then," said Padma, "you'd better listen to me."

"Why, of course," I said.

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"That's my business, listening. Tell me all about ontogenics — and myself."

He made an adjustment in the controls, then swung his seat back to face mine once more.

"The human race," said Padma, "broke up in an evolutionary explosion at the moment in history when interstellar colonization became practical." He sat watching me. I kept my face attentive. "This happened for reasons stemming from racial instinct which we haven't completely charted yet, but which was essentially self-protective in nature."

I reached into my jacket pocket.

"Perhaps I'd better take a few notes," I said.

"If you want to," said Padma, unperturbed. "Out of that explosion came cultures individually devoted to single facets of the human personality. The fighting, combative facet became the Dorsai. The facet which surrendered the individual wholly to some faith or other became the Friendly. The philosophical facet created the Exotic culture to which I belong. We call these Splinter Cultures."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I know about Splinter Cultures."

"You know about them, Tam, but you don't know them."

"I don't?"

"No," said Padma, "because you, like all our ancestors, are from Earth. You're old, full-spectrum man. The Splinter peoples are evolutionarily advanced over you."

I felt a little twist of bitter anger knot suddenly inside me.

"Oh? I'm afraid I don't see that."

"Because you don't want to," said Padma. "If you did, you'd have to admit that they were different from you, and had to be judged by different standards."

"Different? How?"

"Different in a sense that all Splinter people, including myself, understand instinctively, but full-spectrum man has to extrapolate to imagine." Padma shifted a little in his seat. "You'll get some idea, Tam, if you imagine a member of a Splinter culture to be a man like yourself, only with a monomania that shoves him wholly toward being one type of person. But with this difference: Instead of all parts of his mental and physical self outside the limits of that monomania being ignored and atrophied as, they would be with you —"

I interrupted, "Why specifically with me?"

"With any full-spectrum man, then," said Padma calmly.

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"These parts, instead of being atrophied, are altered to agree with and support the monomania, so that we don't have a sick man — but a healthy, different one."

"Healthy?" I said, seeing the Friendly non-com on New Earth again in my mind's eye.

"Healthy as a culture. Not as occasional crippled individuals of that culture. But as a culture."

"Sorry," I said. "I don't believe it."

"But you do, Tam," said Padma, softly. "Unconsciously you do. Because you're planning to take advantage of the weakness such a culture must have to destroy it."

"And what weakness is that?"

"The obvious weakness that's the converse of any strength," said Padma. "The Splinter Cultures are not viable."

I must have blinked. I was honestly bewildered.

"Not viable? You mean they can't live on their own?"

"Of course not," said Padma. "Faced with an expansion into space, the human race reacted to the challenge of a different environment by trying to adapt to it. It adapted by trying out separately all the elements of its personality, to see which could survive best. Now that all elements — the Splinter Cultures — have survived and adapted, it's time for them to breed back into each other again, to produce a more hardy, universe-oriented human."

The aircar began to descend. We were nearing our destination.

"What's that got to do with me?" I said, at last.

"If you frustrate one of the Splinter Cultures, it can't adapt on its own as full-spectrum man would do. It will die. And when the race breeds back to a whole, that valuable element will be lost to the race."

"Maybe it'll be no loss," I said, softly in my turn.

"A vital loss," said Padma. "And I can prove it. You, a full-spectrum man, have in you an element from every Splinter Culture. If you admit this you can identify even with those you want to destroy. I have evidence to show you. Will you look at it?"

The ship touched ground; the door beside me opened. I got out with Padma and found Kensie waiting.

I looked from Padma to Kensie, who stood with us and a head taller than I — two heads taller than OutBond. Kensie looked back down at me with no particular expression. His eyes were not the eyes of his twin brother — but just then, for some reason, I could not meet them.

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"I'm a newsman," I said. "Of course my mind is open."

Padma turned and began walking toward the headquarters building. Kensie fell in with us and I think Janol and some of the others came along behind, though I didn't look back to make sure. We went to the inner office where I first met Graeme — just Kensie, Padma and myself. There was a file folder on Graeme's desk. He picked it up, extracted a photocopy of something and handed it to me as I came up to him.

I took it. There was no doubting its authenticity.

It was a memo from Eldest Bright, ranking elder of the joint government of Harmony and Association, to the Friendly War Chief at the Defense X Center, on Harmony. It was dated two months previously. It was on the single-molecule sheet, where the legend cannot be tampered with, or removed once it is on.

Be Informed, in God's Name —

—That since it does seem the Lord's Will that our Brothers on St. Marie *make no success*, it is ordered that henceforth no more replacements or personnel or supplies be sent them. For if our Captain does intend us the victory, surely we shall conquer without further expenditure. And if it be His will that we conquer not, then surely it would be an impiety to throw away the substance of God's Churches in an attempt to frustrate that Will.

Be it further ordered that our Brothers on St. Marie be spared the knowledge that no further assistance is forthcoming, that they may bear witness to their faith in battle as ever, and God's Churches be undismayed.

Heed this Command, in the Name of the Lord:

By order of he who is called . . .
Bright
Eldest Among The Chosen

I looked up from the memo. Both Graeme and Padma were watching me.

"How'd you get hold of this?" I said. "No, of course you won't tell me." The palms of my hands were suddenly sweating so that the slick material of the sheet in my fingers was slippery. I held it tightly, and talked fast to keep their eyes on my face. "But what about it? We already knew this, everybody knew Bright had abandoned them. This just proves it. Why even bother showing it to me?"

"I thought," said Padma, "it might move you just a little. Perhaps enough to make you take a different view of things."

I said, "I didn't say that wasn't possible. I tell you a Newsman keeps an open mind at all times. Of course," I picked my words carefully, "if I could study it —"

"I'd hoped you'd take it with you," said Padma.

"Hoped?"

"If you dig into it and really

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understand what Bright means there, you might understand all the Friendlies differently. You might change your mind about them."

"I don't think so," I said. "But —"

"Let me ask you to do that much," said Padma. "Take the memo with you."

I stood for a moment, with Padma facing me and Kensie looming behind him, then shrugged and put the memo in my pocket.

"All right," I said. I'll take it back to my quarters and think about it.—I've got a groundcar here somewhere, haven't I?" And I looked at Kensie.

"Ten kilometers back," said Kensie. "You wouldn't get through anyway. We're moving up for the assault and the Friendlies are maneuvering to meet us."

"Take my aircar," said Padma. "The Embassy flags on it will help."

"All right," I said.

We went out together toward the aircar. I passed Janol in the outer office and he met my eyes coldly. I did not blame him. We walked to the aircar and I got in.

"You can send the aircar back whenever you're through with it," said Padma, as I stepped in through the entrance section of its top. "It's an Embassy loan to you, Tam. I won't worry about it."

"No," I said. "You needn't worry."

I closed the section and touched the controls.

It was a dream of an aircar. It went up into the air as lightly as thought, and in a second I was two thousand feet up and well away from the spot. I made myself calm down, though, before I reached into my pocket and took the memo out.

I looked at it. My hand still trembled a little as I held it.

Here it was in my grasp at last. What I had been after from the start. And Padma himself had insisted I carry it away with me.

It was the lever, the Archimedes pry-bar which would move not one world but fourteen. And push the Friendly Peoples over the edge to extinction.

VI

They were waiting for me. They converged on the aircar as I landed it in the interior square of the Friendlies compound, all four of them with black rifles at the ready.

They were apparently the only ones left. Black seemed to have turned out every other man of his remnant of a battle unit. And

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these were all men I recognized, case-hardened veterans. One was the Groupman who had been in the office that first night when I had come back from the Exotic camp and stepped in to speak to Black, asking him if he ever ordered his men to kill prisoners. Another was a forty-year old Force Leader, the lowest commissioned rank, but acting Major — just as Black, a Commandant, was acting as Expeditionary Field Commander — a position equivalent to Kensie Graeme's. The other two soldiers were non-commissioned, but similar. I knew them all. Ultra-fanatics. And they knew me.

We understood each other.

"I have to see the commandant," I said, as I got out, before they could begin to question me.

"On what business?" said the Force-Leader. "This aircar hath no business here. Nor thyself."

I said, "I must see Commandant Black immediately. I wouldn't be here in a car flying the flags of the Exotic Embassy if its wasn't necessary."

They could not take the chance that my reason for seeing Black wasn't important, and I knew it. They argued a little, but I kept insisting I had to see the Commandant. Finally, the Force-Leader took me across into the same outer office where I had always waited to see Black.

I faced Jamethon Black alone in the office.

He was putting on his battle harness, as I had seen Graeme putting on his earlier. On Graeme, the harness and the weapons it carried had looked like toys. On Jamethon's slight frame they looked almost too heavy to bear.

"Mr. Olyn," he said.

I walked across the room toward him, drawing the memo from my pocket as I came. He turned a little to face me, his fingers sealing the locks on his harness, jingling slightly with his weapons and his harness as he turned.

"You're taking the field against the Exotics," I said.

He nodded. I had never been this close to him before. From across the room I would have believed he was holding his usual stony expression, but standing just a few feet from him now I saw the tired wraith of a smile touch the corners of his straight mouth in that dark, young face, for a second.

"That is my duty, Mr. Olyn."

"Some duty," I said. "When your superiors back on Harmony have already written you off their books."

"I've already told you," he said, calmly. "The Chosen are not betrayed in the Lord, one by another."

"You're sure of that?" I said.

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Once more I saw that little ghost of a weary smile.

"It's a subject, Mr. Olyn, on which I am more expert than you."

I looked into his eyes. They were exhausted but calm. I glanced aside at the desk where the picture of the church, the older man and woman and the young girl stood still.

"Your family?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"It seems to me you'd think of them in a time like this."

"I think of them quite often."

"But you're going to go out and get yourself killed just the same."

"Just the same," he said.

"Sure!" I said. "You would!" I had come in calm and in control of myself. But now it was as if a cork had been pulled on all that had been inside me since Dave's death. I began to shake. "Because that's the kind of hypocrites you are — all of you Friendlies. You're so lying, so rotten clear through with your own lies, if someone took them away from you there'd be nothing left. Would there? So you'd rather die now than admit committing suicide like this isn't the most glorious thing in the universe. You'd rather die than admit you're just as full of doubts as anyone else, just as afraid."

I stepped right up to him. He did not move.

"Who're you trying to fool?" I said. "Who? I see through you just like the people on all the other worlds do! I know you know what a mumbo-jumbo your United Churches are. I know you know the way of life you sing of through your nose so much isn't what you claim it is. I know your Eldest Bright and his gang of narrow-minded old men are just a gang of world-hungry tyrants that don't give a damn for religion or anything as long as they get what they want. I know you know it — and I'm going to make you admit it!"

And I shoved the memo under his nose.

"Read it!"

He took it from me. I stepped back from him, shaking badly as I watched him.

He studied it for a long minute, while I held my breath. His face did not change. Then he handed it back to me.

"Can I give you a ride to meet Graeme?" I said. "We can get across the lines in the OutBond's aircar. You can get the surrender over with before any shooting breaks out."

He shook his head. He was looking at me in a particularly level way, with an expression I could not understand.

"What do you mean — no?"

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"You'd better stay here," he said. "Even with ambassadorial flags, that aircar may be shot at over the lines." And he turned as if he would walk away from me, out the door.

"Where're you going?" I shouted at him. I got in front of him and pushed the memo before his eyes again. "That's real. You can't close your eyes to that!"

He stopped and looked at me. Then he reached out and took my wrist and put my arm and hand with the memo aside. His fingers were thin, but much stronger than I thought, so that I let the arm go down in front of him when I hadn't intended to do so.

"I know it's real. I'll have to warn you not to interfere with me any more, Mr. Olyn. I've got to go now." He stepped past me and walked toward the door.

"You're a liar!" I shouted after him. He kept on going. I had to stop him. I grabbed the solidograph from his desk and smashed it on the floor.

He turned like a cat and looked at the broken pieces at my feet.

"That's what you're doing!" I shouted, pointing at them.

He came back without a word and squatted down and carefully gathered up the pieces, one by one. He put them into his pocket and got back to his feet, and raised his face at last to mine. And when I saw his eyes I stopped breathing.

"If my duty," he said, in a low, controlled voice, "were not in this minute to —"

His voice stopped. I saw his eyes staring into me; and slowly I saw them change and the murder that was in them soften into something like wonder.

"Thou —" he said, softly — "Thou hast *no* faith?"

I had opened my mouth to speak. But what he said stopped me. I stood as if punched in the stomach, without the breath for words. He stared at me.

"What made you think," he said, "that that memo would change my mind?"

"You read it!" I said. "Bright wrote you were a losing proposition here, so you weren't to get any more help. And no one was to tell you for fear you might surrender if you knew."

"Is that how you read it?" he said. "Like that?"

"How else? How else can you read it?"

"As it is written." He stood straight facing me now and his eyes never moved from mine. "You have read it without faith, leaving out the Name and the will of the Lord. Eldest Bright wrote not that we were to be abandoned here — but that since

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our cause was sore tried, we be put in the hands of our Captain and our God. And further he wrote that we should not be told of this, that none here should be tempted to a vain and special seeking of the martyr's crown. Look, Mr. Olyn. It's down there in black and white."

"But that's not what he meant! *That's not what he meant!*"

He shook his head. "Mr. Olyn, I can't leave you in such delusion."

I stared at him, for it was sympathy I saw in his face. For me.

"It's your own blindness that deludes you," he said. "You see nothing, and so believe no man can see. Our Lord is not just a name, but all things. That's why we have no ornament in our churches, scorning any painted screen between us and our God. Listen to me, Mr. Olyn. Those churches themselves are but tabernacles of the earth. Our Elders and Leaders, though they are Chosen and Anointed, are still but mortal men. To none of these things or people do we hearken in our faith, but to the very voice of God within us."

He paused. Somehow I could not speak.

"Suppose it was even as you think," he went on, even more gently. "Suppose that all you say was a fact; and that our Elders were but greedy tyrants, ourselves abandoned here by their selfish will and set to fulfill a false and prideful purpose. No." Jamethon's voice rose. "Let me attest as if it were only for myself. Suppose that you could give me proof that all our Elders lied, that our very Covenant was false. Suppose that you could prove to me —" his face lifted to mine and his voice drove at me — "that all was perversion and falsehood, and nowhere among the Chosen, not even in the house of my father, was there faith or hope! If you could prove to me that no miracle could save me, that no soul stood with me — and that opposed were all the legions of the universe — still I, I *alone,* Mr. Olyn, would go forward as I have been commanded, to the end of the universe, to the culmination of eternity. For without my faith I am but common earth. But with my faith, there is no power can stay me!"

He stopped speaking and turned about. I watched him walk across the room and out the door.

Still I stood there, as if I had been fastened in place — until I heard from outside, in the square of the compound, the sound of a military aircar starting up.

I broke out of my stasis then and ran out of the building.

As I burst into the square, the

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military aircar was just taking off. I could see Black and his four hard-shell subordinates in it. And I yelled up into the air after them.

"That's all right for you, but what about your men?"

They could not hear me. I knew that. Uncontrollable tears were running down my face, but I screamed up into the air after him anyway —

"You're killing your men to prove your point! Can't you listen? You're murdering helpless men!"

Unheeding, the military aircar dwindled rapidly to the west and south, where the converging battle forces waited. And the heavy concrete walls and buildings about the empty compound threw back my words with a hollow, wild and mocking echo.

VII

I should have gone to the spaceport. Instead, I got back into the aircar and flew back across the lines looking for Graeme's Battle Command Center.

I was as little concerned about my own life just then as a Friendly. I think I was shot at once or twice, in spite of the ambassadorial flags on the aircar, but I don't remember exactly. Eventually I found the Command Center and descended.

Enlisted men surrounded me as I stepped out of the aircar. I showed my credentials and went up to the battle screen, which had been set up in open air at the edge of shadow from some tall variform oaks. Graeme, Padma and his whole staff were grouped around it, watching the movements of their own and the Friendly troops reported on it. A continual low-voiced discussion of the movements went on, and a steady stream of information came from the communications center fifteen feet off.

The sun slanted steeply through the trees. It was almost noon and the day was bright and warm. No one looked at me for a long time; and then Janol, turning away from the screen, caught sight of me standing off at one side by the flat-topped shape of a tactics computer. His face went cold. He went on about what he was doing. But I must have been looking pretty bad, because after a while he came by with a canteen cup and set it down on the computer top.

"Drink that," he said shortly, and went off. I picked it up, found it was Dorsai whisky and swallowed it down. I could not taste it; but evidently it did me some good, because in a few minutes the world began to sort itself out around me and I began to think again.

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I went up to Janol. "Thanks."

"All right." He did not look at me, but went on with the papers on the field desk before him.

"Janol," I said. "Tell me what's going on."

"See for yourself," he said, still bent over his papers.

"I can't see for myself. You know that. Look — I'm sorry about what I did. But this is my job, too. Can't you tell me what's going on now and fight with me afterwards?"

"You know I can't brawl with civilians." Then his face relaxed. "All right," he said, straightening up. "Come on."

He led me over to the battle screen, where Padma and Kensie were standing, and pointed to a sort of small triangle of darkness between two snakelike lines of light. Other spots and shapes of light ringed it about.

"These —" he pointed to the two snakelike lines — "are the Macintok and Sarah Rivers, where they come together — just about ten miles this side of Joseph's Town. It's fairly high ground, hills thick with cover, fairly open between them. Good territory for setting up a stubborn defense, bad area to get trapped in."

"Why?"

He pointed to the two river lines.

"Get backed up in here and you find yourself hung up on high bluffs over the river. There is no easy way across, no cover for retreating troops. It's nearly all open farmland the rest of the way, from the other sides of the rivers to Joseph's Town."

His finger moved back out from the point where the river lines came together, past the small area of darkness and into the surrounding shapes and rings of light.

"On the other hand, the approach to this territory from our position is through open country, too — narrow strips of farmland interspersed with a lot of swamp and marsh. It's a tight situation for either commander, if we commit to a battle here. The first one who has to backpedal will find himself in trouble in a hurry."

"Are you going to commit?"

"It depends. Black sent his light armor forward. Now he's pulling back into the high ground, between the rivers. We're far superior in strength and equipment. There's no reason for us not to go in after him, as long as he's trapped himself —" Janol broke off.

"No reason?" I asked.

"Not from a tactical standpoint." Janol frowned at the screen. "We couldn't get into trouble unless we suddenly had

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to retreat. And we wouldn't do that unless he suddenly acquired some great tactical advantage that'd make it impossible for us to stay there."

I looked at his profile.

"Such as losing Graeme?" I said.

He transferred his frown to me. "There's no danger of that."

There was a certain change in the movement and the voices of the people around us. We both turned and looked.

Everybody was clustering around a screen. We moved in with the crowd and, looking between the soldiers of two of the officers of Graeme's staff, I saw on the screen the image of a small grassy meadow enclosed by wooded hills. In the center of the meadow, the Friendly flag floated its thin black cross on white background beside a long table on the grass. There were folding chairs on each side of the table, but only one person—a Friendly officer, standing on the table's far side as if waiting. There were the lilac bushes along the edge of the wooded hills where they came down in variform oak and ash to the meadow's edge; and the lavender blossoms were beginning to brown and darken for their season was almost at an end. So much difference had twenty-four hours made. Off to the left of the screen I could see the gray concrete of a highway.

"I know that place—" I started to say, turning to Janol.

"Quiet!" he said, holding up a finger. Around us, everybody else had fallen still. Up near the front of our group a single voice was talking.

"—it's a truce table."

"Have they called?" said the voice of Kensie.

"No, sir."

"Well, let's go see." There was a stir up front. The group began to break up and I saw Kensie and Padma walking off toward the area where the aircars were parked. I shoved myself through the thinning crowd like a process server, running after them.

I heard Janol shout behind me, but I paid no attention. Then I was up to Kensie and Padma, who turned.

"I want to go with you," I said.

"It's all right, Janol," Kensie said, looking past me. "You can leave him with us."

"Yes, sir." I could hear Janol turn and leave.

"So you want to come with me, Mr. Olyn?" Kensie said.

"I know that spot," I told him. "I drove by it just earlier today. The Friendlies were

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taking tactical measurements all over that meadow and the hills on both sides. They weren't setting up truce talks."

Kensie looked at me for a long moment, as if he was taking some tactical measurements himself.

"Come on, then," he said. He turned to Padma. "You'll be staying here?"

"It's a combat zone. I'd better not." Padma turned his unwrinkled face to me. "Good luck, Mr. Olyn," he said, and walked away. I watched his yellow-robed figure glide over the turf for a second, then turned to see Graeme halfway to the nearest military aircar. I hurried after him.

It was a battle car, not luxurious like the OutBond's, and Kensie did not cruise at two thousand feet, but snaked it between the trees just a few feet above ground. The seats were cramped. His big frame overfilled his, crowding me where I sat. I felt the butt-plate of his spring pistol grinding into my side with every movement he made on the controls.

We came at last to the edge of the wooded and hilly triangle occupied by the Friendlies and mounted a slope under the cover of the new-leaved variform oaks.

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They were massive enough to have killed off most ground cover. Between their pillar-like trunks the ground was shaded, and padded with the brown shapes of dead leaves. Near the crest of the hill, we came upon a unit of Exotic troops resting and waiting the orders to advance. Kensie got out of the car and returned the Force-Leader's salute.

"You've seen these tables the Friendlies set up?" Kensie asked.

"Yes, Commander. That officer they've got is still standing there. If you go just up over the crest of the slope here, you can see him—and the furniture."

"Good," said Kensie. "Keep your men here, Force. The Newsman and I'll go take a look."

He led the way up among the oak trees. At the top of the hill we looked down through about fifty yards more of trees and out into the meadow. It was two hundred yards across, the table right in the middle, the unmoving black figure of the Friendly officer standing on its far side.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Olyn?" asked Kensie, looking down through the trees.

"Why hasn't somebody shot him?" I asked.

He glanced sideways at me.

"There's plenty of time to shoot him," he said, "before he can get back to cover on the far side. If we have to shoot him at all. That wasn't what I wanted to know. You've seen the Friendly commander recently. Did he give you the impression he was ready to surrender?"

"No!" I said.

"I see," said Kensie.

"You don't really think he means to surrender? What makes you think something like that?"

"Truce tables are generally set up for the discussion of terms between opposing forces," he said.

"But he hasn't asked you to meet him?"

"No," Kensie watched the figure of the Friendly officer, motionless in the sunlight. "It might be against his principles to call for a discussion, but not to discuss—if we just happened to find ourselves across a table from one another."

He turned and signaled with his hand. The Force-Leader, who had been waiting down the slope behind us, came up.

"Sir?" he said to Kensie.

"Any Friendly strength in those trees across the way?"

"Four men, that's all, sir. Our scopes pick out their body heats clear and sharp. They aren't attempting to hide."

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"I see." He paused, "Force."

"Sir?"

"Be good enough to go down there in the meadow and ask that Friendly officer what this is all about."

"Yes, sir."

We stood and watched as the Force-Leader went stiff-legging it down the steep slope between the trees. He crossed the grass —it seemed very slowly—and came up to the Friendly officer.

They stood facing each other. They were talking but there was no way to hear their voices. The flag with its thin black cross whipped in the little breeze that was blowing there. Then the Force-Leader turned and climbed back toward us.

He stopped in front of Kensie, and saluted. "Commander," he said, "the Commander of the Chosen Troops of God will meet with you in the field to discuss a surrender." He stopped to draw a fresh breath. "If you'll show yourself at the edge of the opposite woods at the same time; and you can approach the table together."

"Thank you, Force-Leader," said Kensie. He looked past his officer at the field and the table. "I think I'll go down."

"He doesn't mean it," I said.

"Force-Leader," said Kensie. "Form your men ready, just under the crown of the slope on the back side, here. If he surrenders, I'm going to insist he come back with me to this side immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"All this business without a regular call for parley may be because he wants to surrender first and break the news of it to his troops afterwards. So get your men ready. If Black intends to present his officers with an accomplished fact, we don't want to let him down."

"He's not going to surrender," I said.

"Mr. Olyn," said Kensie, turning to me. "I suggest you go back behind the crest of the hill. The Force-Leader will see you're taken care of."

"No," I said. "I'm going down. If it's a truce parley to discuss surrender terms, there's no combat situation involved and I've got a perfect right to be there. If it isn't, what're you doing going down yourself?"

Kensie looked at me strangely for a moment.

"All right," he said. "Come with me."

Kensie and I turned and went down the sharply pitched slope between the trees. Our boot-soles slipped until our heels dug in, with every step downward. Coming through the

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lilacs I smelled the faint, sweet scent—almost gone now—of the decaying blossoms.

Across the meadow, directly in line with the table, four figures in black came forward as we came forward. One of them was Jamethon Black.

Kensie and Jamethon saluted each other.

"Commandant Black," said Kensie.

"Yes, Commander Graeme. I am indebted to you for meeting me here," said Jamethon.

"My duty and a pleasure, Commandant."

"I wished to discuss the terms of a surrender."

"I can offer you," said Kensie, "the customary terms extended to troops in your position under the Mercenaries' Code."

"You misunderstand me, sir," said Jamethon. "It was your surrender I came here to discuss."

The flag snapped.

Suddenly I saw the men in black measuring the field here, as I had seen them the day before. They had been right where we were now.

"I'm afraid the misunderstanding is mutual, Commandant," said Kensie. "I am in a superior tactical position and your defeat is normally certain. I have no need to surrender."

"You will not surrender?"

"No," said Kensie strongly.

All at once I saw the five stakes, in the position the Friendly non-coms, officers and Jamethon were now, and the stake up in front of them fallen down.

"Look out!" I shouted at Kensie—but I was far too late.

Things had already begun to happen. The Force-Leader had jerked back in front of Jamethon and all five of them were drawing their sidearms. I heard the flag snap again, and the sound of its rolling seemed to go on for a long time.

For the first time then I saw a man of the Dorsai in action. So swift was Kensie's reaction that it was eerily as if he had read Jamethon's mind in the instant before the Friendlies began to reach of their weapons. As their hands touched their sidearms, he was already in movement forward over the table and his spring pistol was in his hand. He seemed to fly directly into the Force-Leader and the two of them went down together, but Kensie kept travelling. He rolled on off the Force-Leader who now lay still in the grass. He came to his knees, fired, and dived forward, rolling again.

The Groupman on Jamethon's right went down. Jamethon and the remaining two were turned nearly full about now, trying to keep Kensie before them. The

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two that were left shoved themselves in front of Jamethon, their weapons not yet aimed. Kensie stopped moving as if he had run into a stone wall, came to his feet in a crouch, and fired twice more. The two Friendlies fell apart, one to each side.

Jamethon was facing Kensie now, and Jamethon's pistol was in his hand and aimed. Jamethon fired, and a light blue streak leaped through the air, but Kensie had dropped again. Lying on his side on the grass, propped on one elbow, he pressed the firing button on his spring pistol twice.

Jamethon's sidearm sagged in his hand. He was backed up against the table now, and he put out his free hand to steady himself against the table top. He made another effort to lift his sidearm but he could not. It dropped from his hand. He bore more of his weight on the table, half-turning around, and his face came about to look in my direction. His face was as controlled as it had ever been, but there was something different about his eyes as he looked into mine and recognized me—something oddly like the look a man gives a competitor whom he had just beaten, and who was no real threat to begin with. A little smile touched the corners of his thin lips. Like a smile of inner triumph.

"Mr. Olyn . . ." he whispered. And then the life went out of his face and he fell beside the table.

Nearby explosions shook the ground under my feet. From the crest of the hill behind us the Force-Leader whom Kensie had left there was firing smoke bombs between us and the Friendly side of the meadow. A gray wall of smoke was rising between us and the far hillside, to screen us from the enemy. It towered up the blue sky like some impassable barrier, and under the looming height of it, only Kensie and I were standing.

On Jamethon's dead face there was a faint smile.

VIII

In a daze I watched the Friendly troops surrender that same day. It was the one situation in which their officers felt justified in doing so.

Not even their Elders expected subordinates to fight a situation set up by a dead Field Commander for tactical reasons unexplained to his officers. And the live troops remaining were worth more than the indemnity charges for them that the Exotics would make.

I did not wait for the settlements. I had nothing to wait for. One moment the situation on this

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battlefield had been poised like some great, irresistable wave above all our heads, cresting, curling over and about to break downward with an impact that would reverberate through all the worlds of Man. Now, suddenly, it was no longer above us. There was nothing but a far-flooding silence, already draining away into the records of the past.

There was nothing for me. Nothing.

If Jamethon had succeeded in killing Kensie—even if as a result he had won a practically bloodless surrender of the Exotic troops—I might have done something damaging with the incident of the truce table. But he had only tried; and died, failing. Who could work up emotion against the Friendlies for that?

I took ship back to Earth like a man walking in a dream, asking myself why.

Back on Earth, I told my editors I was not in good shape physically; and they took one look at me and believed me. I took an indefinite leave from my job and sat around the News Network Center Library, at the Hague, searching blindly through piles of writings and reference material on the Friendlies, the Dorsai and the Exotic worlds. For what? I did not know. I also watched the news dispatches from St. Marie concerning the settlement, and drank too much while I watched.

I had the numb feeling of a soldier sentenced to death for failure on duty. Then in the news dispatches came the information that Jamethon's body would be returned to Harmony for burial; and I realized suddenly it was this I had been waiting for: The unnatural honoring by fanatics of the fanatic who with four henchmen had tried to assassinate the lone enemy commander under a truce flag. Things could still be written.

I shaved, showered, pulled myself together after a fashion and went to see my superiors about being sent to Harmony to cover the burial of Jamethon, as a wrap-up.

The congratulations of the Director of News Network, that had reached me on St. Marie earlier, stood me in good stead. It was still fresh in the minds of the men just over me. I was sent.

Five days later I was on Harmony, in a little town called Remembered-of-the-Lord. The buildings in the town were of concrete and bubble plastic, though evidently they had been up for many years. The thin, stony soil about the town had been tilled as the fields on St. Marie had been tilled when I

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got to that other world—for Harmony now was just entering the spring of its northern hemisphere. And it was raining as I drove from the spaceport of the town, as it had on St. Marie that first day. But the Friendly fields I saw did not show the rich darkness of the fields of St. Marie. Only a thin, hard blackness in the wet that was like the color of Friendly uniforms.

I got to the church just as people were beginning to arrive. Under the dark, draining skies, the interior of the church was almost too dim to let me see my way about—for the Friendlies permit themselves no windows and no artificial lighting in their houses of worship. Gray light, cold wind and rain entered the doorless portal at the back of the church. Through the single rectangular opening in the roof watery sunlight filtered over Jamethon's body, on a platform set up on trestles. A transparent cover had been set up to protect the body from the rain, which was channeled off the open space and ran down a drain in the back wall. But the elder conducting the Death Service and anyone coming up to view the body was expected to stand exposed to sky and weather.

I got in line with the people moving slowly down the central aisle and past the body. To right and left of me the barriers at which the congregation would stand during the service were lost in gloom. The rafters of the steeply pitched roof were hidden in darkness. There was no music, but the low sound of voices individually praying to either side of me in the ranks of barriers and in the line blended into a sort of rhythmic undertone of sadness. Like Jamethon, the people were all very dark here, being of North African extraction. Dark into dark, they blended, and were lost about me in the gloom.

I came up and passed at last by Jamethon. He looked as I remembered him. Death had had no power to change him. He lay on his back, his hands at his sides, and his lips were as firm and straight as ever. Only his eyes were closed.

I was limping noticably because of the dampness, and as I turned away from the body, I felt my elbow touched. I turned back sharply. I was not wearing my correspondent's uniform. I was in civilian clothes, so as to be inconspicuous.

I looked down into the face of the young girl in Jamethon's solidograph. In the gray rainy light her unlined face was like something from the stained glass window of an ancient cathedral back on Old Earth.

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"You've been wounded," she said in a soft voice to me. "You must be one of the mercenaries who knew him on Newton, before he was ordered to Harmony. His parents, who are mine as well, would find solace in the Lord by meeting you."

The wind blew rain down through the overhead opening all about me, and its icy feel sent a chill suddenly shooting through me, freezing me to my very bones.

"No!" I said. "I'm not. I didn't know him." And I turned sharply away from her and pushed my way into the crowd, back up the aisle.

After about fifteen feet, I realized what I was doing and slowed down. The girl was already lost in the darkness of the bodies behind me. I made my way more slowly toward the back of the church, where there was a little place to stand before the first ranks of the barriers began. I stood watching the people come in. They came and came, walking in in their black clothing with their heads down and talking or praying in low voices.

I stood where I was, a little back from the entrance, half numbed and dull-minded with the chill about me and the exhaustion I had brought with me from Earth. The voices droned about me. I almost dozed, standing there. I could not remember why I had come.

Then a girl's voice emerged from the jumble, bringing me back to full consciousness again.

"—he did deny it, but I am sure he is one of those mercenaries who was with Jamethon on Newton. He limps and can only be a soldier who hath been wounded."

It was the voice of Jamethon's sister, speaking with more of the Friendly cant on her tongue than she had used speaking to me, a stranger. I woke fully and saw her standing by the entrance only a few feet from me, half-facing two elder people who I recognized as the older couple in Jamethon's solidograph. A bolt of pure, freezing horror shot through me.

"No!" I nearly shouted at them. "I don't know him. I never knew him—I don't understand what you're talking about!" And I turned and bolted out through the entrance of the church into the concealing rain.

I all but ran for about thirty or forty feet. Then I heard no footsteps behind me; I stopped.

I was alone in the open. The day was even darker now and the rain suddenly came down harder. It obscured everything around me with a drumming, shimmering curtain. I could not

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even see the groundcars in the parking lot toward which I was facing; and for sure they could not see me from the church. I lifted my face up to the downpour and let it beat upon my cheeks and my closed eyelids.

"So," said a voice from behind me. "You did not know him?"

The words seemed to cut me down the middle, and I felt as a cornered wolf must feel. Like a wolf I turned.

"Yes, I knew him!" I said.

Facing me was Padma, in a blue robe the rain did not seem to dampen. His empty hands that had never held a weapon in their life were clasped together before him. But the wolf part of me knew that as far as I was concerned, he was armed and a hunter.

"You?" I said. "What are you doing here?"

"It was calculated you would be here," said Padma, softly. "So I am here, too. But why are you here, Tam? Among those people in there, there's sure to be at least a few fanatics who've heard the camp rumors of your responsibility in the matter of Jamethon's death and the Friendlies' surrender."

"Rumors!" I said. "Who started them?"

"You did," Padma said. "By your actions on St. Marie." He gazed at me. "Didn't you know you were risking your life, coming here today?"

I opened my mouth to deny it. Then I realized I had known.

"What if someone should call out to them," said Padma, "that Tam Olyn, the St. Marie campaign Newsman, is here incognito?"

I looked at him with my wolf-feeling, grimly.

"Can you square it with your Exotic principles if you do?"

"We are misunderstood," answered Padma calmly. "We hire soldiers to fight for us not because of some moral commandment, but because our emotional perspective is lost if we become involved."

There was no fear left in me. Only a hard, empty feeling.

"Then call them," I said.

Padma's strange, hazel eyes watched me through the rain.

"If that was all that was needed," he said. "I could have sent word to them. I wouldn't have needed to come myself."

"Why did you come?" My voice tore at my throat. "What do you care about me, or the Exotics?"

"We care for every individual," said Padma. "But we care more for the race. And you remain dangerous to it. You're an idealist, Tam, warped to destructive purpose. There is a law of conservation of energy in the

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pattern of cause-and-effect as in other sciences. Your destructiveness was frustrated on St. Marie. Now it may turn inward to destroy you, or outward against the whole race of man."

I laughed, and heard the harshness of my laughter.

"What're you going to do about it?" I said.

"Show you how the knife you hold cuts the hand that holds it as well as what you turn it against. I have news for you, Tam. Kensie Graeme is dead."

"*Dead?*" The rain seemed to roar around me suddenly and the parking lot shifted unsubstantially under my feet.

"He was assassinated by three men of the Blue Front in Blauvain five days ago."

"Assassinated . . ." I whispered. "Why?"

"Because the war was over," said Padma. "Because Jamethon's death and the surrender of the Friendly troops without the preliminary of a war that would tear up the countryside left the civilian population favorably disposed toward our troops. Because the Blue Front found themselves farther from power than ever, as a result of this favorable feeling. They hoped by killing Graeme to provoke his troops into retaliation against the civilian population, so that the St. Marie government would have to order them home to our Exotics, and stand unprotected to face a Blue Front revolt."

I stared at him.

"All things are interrelated," said Padma. "Kensie was slated for a final promotion to a desk command back on Mara or Kultis. He and his brother Ian would have been out of the wars for the rest of their professional lives. Because of Jamethon's death, that allowed the surrender of his troops without fighting, a situation was set up which led the Blue Front to assassinate Kensie. If you and Jamethon had not come together on St. Marie, and Jamethon had won, Kensie would still be alive. So our calculations show."

"Jamethon and I?" The breath went dry in my throat without warning, and the rain came down harder.

"You were the factor," said Padma, "that helped Jamethon to his solution."

"I helped him!" I said. "*I* did?"

"He saw through you," said Padma. "He saw through the revenge-bitter, twisted surface you thought was yourself, to the idealistic core that was so deep in the bone of you that even your uncle hadn't been able to eradicate it."

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The rain thundered between us. But Padma's every word came clearly through it to me.

"I don't believe you!" I shouted. "I don't believe he did anything like that!"

"I told you," said Padma, "you didn't fully appreciate the evolutionary advances of our Splinter Cultures. Jamethon's faith was not the kind that can be shaken by outer things. If you had been in fact like your uncle, he would not even have listened to you. He would have dismissed you as a soulless man. As it was, he thought of you instead as a man possessed. A man speaking with what he would have called Satan's voice."

"I don't believe it!" I yelled.

"You do believe it," said Padma. "You've got no choice except to believe it. Because only because of it could Jamethon find his solution."

"Solution!"

"He was a man ready to die for his faith. But as a commander he found it hard his men should go out to die for no other reasonable cause." Padma watched me, and the rain thinned for a moment. "But you offered him what he recognized as the devil's choice—his life in this world, if he would surrender his faith and his men, to avoid the conflict that would end in his death and theirs."

"What crazy thinking was that?" I said. Inside the church, the praying had stopped, and a single strong, deep voice was beginning the burial service.

"Not crazy," said Padma. "The moment he realized this, his answer became simple. All he had to do was begin by denying whatever the Satan offered. He must start with the absolute necessity of his own death."

"And that was a solution?" I tried to laugh but my throat hurt.

"It was the only solution," said Padma. "Once he decided that, he saw immediately that the one situation in which his men would permit themselves to surrender was if he was dead and they were in an untenable position for reasons only he had known."

I felt the words go through me with a soundless shock.

"But he didn't mean to die!" I said.

"He left it to his God," said Padma. "He arranged it so only a miracle could save him."

"What're you talking about?" I stared at him. "He set up a table with a flag of truce. He took four men—"

"There was no flag. The men were overage, martyrdom-seekers."

"He took four!" I shouted. "Four and one made five. The five of them against one man. I

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stood there by that table and saw. Five against—"

"Tam."

The single word stopped me. Suddenly I began to be afraid. I did not want to hear what he was about to say. I was afraid I knew what he was going to tell me. That I had known it for some time. And I did not want to hear it, I did not want to hear him say it. The rain grew even stronger, driving upon us both and mercilessly on the concrete, but I heard every word relentlessly through all its sound and noise.

Padma's voice began to roar in my ears like the rain, and a feeling came over me like the helpless floating sensation that comes in high fever. "Did you think that Jamethon for a minute fooled himself? He was a product of a Splinter Culture. He recognized another in Kensie. Did you think that for a minute he thought that barring a miracle he and four overage fanatics could kill an armed, alert and ready man of the Dorsai—*a man like Kensie Graeme?* Before they were gunned down and killed themselves?"

Themselves . . . themselves . . . themselves . . .

I rode off a long way on that word from the dark day and the rain. Like the rain and the wind behind the clouds it lifted me and carried me away at last to that high, hard and stony land I had glimpsed when I had asked Kensie Graeme that question about his ever allowing Friendly prisoners to be killed. It was this land I had always avoided, but to it I was come at last.

And I remembered . . .

From the beginning, I had known inside myself that the fanatic who had killed Dave and the others was not the image of all Friendlies. Jamethon was no casual killer. I had tried to make him into one in order to hide my own shame, my own self-destruction. For three years I had lied to myself. It had not been with me as I claimed, at Dave's death.

I had sat there under that tree watching Dave and the others die, watching the black-clad Groupman killing them with his machine rifle. And, in that moment, the thought in my mind had not been the one with which I justified three years of hunting for an opportunity to ruin someone like Jamethon and destroy the Friendly peoples.

It had not been me, thinking, *what is he doing there, what is he doing to those helpless, innocent men!* I had thought nothing so noble. Only one thought had filled all my mind and body in that instant. It had been simp-

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ly— *after he's done, is he going to turn that gun on me?*

I came back to the day and to the rain. The rain was slackening and Padma was holding me upright. As with Jamethon, I was amazed at the strength of his hands.

"Let me go," I mumbled.

"Where would you go, Tam?" said Padma.

"Any place," I muttered. "I'll get out of it. I'll go hole up somewhere and get out of it. I'll give up."

"An action," said Padma, letting me go, "goes on reverberating for ever. Cause never ceases its effects. You can't let go now, Tam. You can only change sides."

"Sides!" I said. The rain was dwindling fast. "What sides?" I stared at him drunkenly.

"You uncle's side which is one," said Padma. "And the opposing side, which is yours— which is ours as well." The rain was falling only lightly now, and the day was lightening. A little pale sunlight worked through thin clouds and illuminated the space between us. "In addition there are two strong influences besides we Exotics concerned with the attempt of man to evolve. We can't calculate or understand them yet, beyond the fact they act almost as single powerful individual wills. One seems to try to aid, one to frustrate, the evolutionary process; and their influences can be traced back at least as far as man's first venture into space from Earth."

I shook my head.

"I don't understand it," I muttered. "It's not my business."

"It is. It has been all your life." Padma eyes caught light for a moment. "A force intruded on the pattern on St. Marie, in the shape of a unit warped by personal loss and oriented toward violence. That was you, Tam."

I tried to shake my head again, but I knew he was right.

"You are blocked in your effort," said Padma. "But the law of conservation of energies could not be denied. When you were frustrated by Jamethon, your force, transmuted, left the pattern in the unit of another individual, warped by personal loss and oriented toward violent effect on the fabric."

I stared at him and wet my lips. "What other individual?"

"Ian Graeme."

I stared at him.

"Ian found his brother's three assassins hiding in a hotel room in Blauvain. He killed them with his hands — and in doing that he calmed the mercenaries and frustrated the Blue Front. But

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then he resigned and went home to the Dorsai. He's charged now with the sense of loss and bitterness you were charged with when you came to St. Marie." Padma paused and added softly. "Now he has great causal potential for some purpose we can't yet calculate."

"But—" I looked at Padma. "You mean I'm free!"

Padma shook his head.

"You're only charged with a different force instead," he said. "You received the full impact and charge of Jamethon's self-sacrifice."

He looked at me almost with sympathy, and in spite of the sunlight I began to shiver.

It was so. I could not deny it. Jamethon, in giving his life up for a belief, when I had thrown away all belief before the face of death, had melted and changed me as lightning melts and changes the uplifted sword-blade that it strikes. I could not deny what had happened to me.

"No," I said, shivering, "I can't do anything about it."

"You can," said Padma, calmly. "You will."

He unclasped his hands that he had held together earlier.

"The purpose for which we calculated I should meet you here is accomplished now," he said. "The idealism which was basic in you remains. Even your uncle couldn't take it from you. He could only attack it so that the threat of death on New Earth could twist it for a while against itself. Now you've been hammered straight in the forge of events on St. Marie."

I laughed, and the laugh hurt my throat still.

"I don't feel straight," I said.

"Give yourself time," said Padma. "Healing takes time. New growth has to harden, like muscle, before it becomes useful. Now you understand much more about the faith of the Friendlies, the courage of the Dorsai—and something of the philosophical strength for man we work toward on the Exotics."

He stopped and smiled at me. Almost an impish smile.

"It should have been clear to you a long while ago, Tam," he said. "Your job's the job of translator — between the old and the new. Your work will prepare the minds of the people on all the worlds—full-spectrum and Splinter Culture alike—for the day when the talents of the race will combine into the new breed." The smile softened, his face saddened. "You'll live to see more of it than I. Good-by, Tam."

He turned. Through the still misty, but brightening air, I saw him walking alone toward the church, from which came the voice of the speaker within, now

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announcing the number of the final hymn.

Dazedly, I turned away myself, went to my car and got in. Now the rain was almost over and the sky was brightening fast. The faint moisture fell, it seemed, more kindly; and the air was fresh and new.

I put the car windows open as I pulled out of the lot onto the long road back to the spaceport. And through the open window beside me I heard them beginning to sing the final hymn inside the church.

It was the Battle Hymn of the Friendly Soldiers that they sang. As I drove away down the road the voices seemed to follow me strongly. Not sounding slowly and mournfully as if in sadness and farewell, but strongly and triumphantly, as in a marching song on the lips of those taking up a route at the beginning of a new day.

Soldier, ask not—now or ever!—
Where to war your banners go!

The singing followed me as I drove away. And as I got farther into the distance, the voices seemed to blend until they sounded like one voice alone, powerfully singing. Ahead, the clouds were breaking. With the sun shining through, the patches of blue sky were like bright flags waving—like the banners of an army, marching forever forward into lands unknown.

I watched them, as I drove forward toward where they blended into open sky; and for a long time I heard the singing behind me, as I drove to the spaceport and the ship for Earth that waited in the sunlight.

—GORDON R. DICKSON

MARTIAN PLAY SONG

Urapod! Urapod! Amoeba man!
Make me into twins just as fast as you can.
Take me and break me and prick me with "B"
So I'll know which is Baby and which one is me!

— JOHN BURRESS

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Be of Good Cheer

BY FRITZ LEIBER

Don't worry! We're your friends! We've taken your work, your planet and your hopes—but don't worry!

from: Josh B. Smiley
Bureau of Public Morale
Level 77
The White Pentacle
Manhattan, D.C.
10011100011110

to: Hermione Fennerghast
10001377 Sunset Blvd.
Santa Barbara, Big Angeles
1010001001001111

Dear Senior Citizen,

I have in hand your letter of fears and surmises regarding the end of the world: the chilling absence of people on the streets and slideways and in neighboring houses (which understandably depresses

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you); the vanishment of friends and relatives; the cessation of all personal mail (This letter at least is an exception!); the decline in news of human interest on your mass mediator and its replacement by what you call Picasserie or robo-blobs; the surliness of robots when you address questions to them; the invasion of your home at all hours by other robots (who, however, I note, continue to deliver to you your wheat germ, yogurt, and other necessities); the failure of indoor and street lights (though not of robo-supply electricity itself and other basic utilities); the labor you have been put to digging a latrine in your garden; the urge you feel to laugh and babble wildly (which you do well to repress--Congratulations on your courage!); the ominous and evil-smelling gray fogs which roll along the streets and often blanket most of the city; the fine metal filaments which have recently crawled like wire-worms or fairy ivy into your home; your wee-hour-of-the-night dreads that some cold mindless machine is running the cosmos and not a warmly personal God; the darkness; the damp; the dimming of the stars; the smell of mold; the fading forever of childish voices; the unintelligible croaking coming closer every night; the rustle of dry leaves across the floors of long-empty swimming pools.

All these signs and portents, and the others to which you allude, have been carefully probed by our Fear Scanners and investigated by our Bugaboo Teams.

I have, believe me, turned them over more than once in my mind before dictating this answer. I am troubled myself at times by dreads, let me confess. And so I feel an especial sympathy for your apprehensions!

But first I must reveal to you that your experience has been unique. Yours is the first and only letter about end-of-the-world fears to be received by this bureau since its establishment during the period of the Dark Prelude. In fact, your letter caused quite a commotion here! exclamations of amazement, faint odor of overheated insulation, St. Elmo's fire playing about the robo-sex. (Short for robo-secretaries no impropriety intended.) You are the only human on Earth (save myself) . . . I repeat, you are the Only Human Being on Earth to have felt even the cool shadow of such fears. Elsewhere the world is merry and progresses toward ever dizzier and more delirious heights of achievement.

We must suppose that your experience is due to a concatenation of circumstances having a probability of inverse infinity.

You know how such things go: a few weeks or months of total

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solitude, a scratching at the door by night, a creaking in the hall, a tall thin shadow trembling on the bedroom doorsill in the hoarded candlelight . . . and hey, presto! we have a ghost.

Also we must assume that you possess an exceptional sensitivity. You are, figuratively or literally, the princess who slept on the many mattresses. While coarser natures revel in the downy pneumatic softness, you feel only the pea. Or ball-bearing, perhaps.

Don't be offended for one instant at this assessment. The contrary rather. Your sensitivity is a great gift, whereby you can relieve and enrich your loneliness until you are quite unaware of it and almost oblivious of the gray fog lapping ever higher each evening against your view window. Try to discern the subtle meanings that lie behind the abstract robo-blobs racing across the screen of your mass mediator. (I sometimes do myself, though must confess I find little beyond a pattern as random as that of the fading stars - still, it induces sleep with the help of barbiturates.)

Commune with pets! Of course dogs and cats and rats and snakes are gone, not to mention the winsome portly elf-footed mice. But some of our correspondents report establishing a rewarding rapport with cockroaches, flies, silverfish and sexton beetles.

Or shut your ears to the dead leaves' rustle and listen to the exuberant song of the remaining blades of grass as they bravely shoulder their way through the hairline cracks they make in the world's oppressive concrete crust. Famous poets are said to have got great satisfaction thereby.

Now to dispose of the more important of your specific apprehensions detailed in my first paragraph:

People have gone underground to dwell in the shelter cities, or have migrated to other planets. Some have donned aqualungs, or undergone surgical gill-implant, and retired to the mystic oceanic deeps because, as those enthusiasts put it, "they are there." Others have soared to the satallite suburbs, which you may see traveling twinklingly amongst the fixed stars if the gray fog ever relents and gives you a clear night. Still others have sought permanent tranquility in their neighborhood euthanasia booth. A few have had the good fortune to have their brains incorporated into the memory units of computers or even mobile robots, discovering in this way a wider vision and a continuing if somewhat subordinate existence--even a sort of immortality!

We do not suggest that you seek to follow any of these examples, since you appear to possess a splendid talent for getting

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along without people. Or even without robots. (I jest.)

Most of the robots who do not respond to your questions are not being impolite at all. They are simply unable to speak English. Such language capacity was installed in early models, but adversely effected the efficiency of later ones, became burdensome to them, and was discarded. However, they did not become mutes--banish that fear! Most of them speak a melodious jargon sometimes called Robotese which is understood only by themselves and which accounts for those croakings which you hear coming closer in the night--and which I am sure will no longer trouble you now that you know the real explanation.

I am conscious that I am not explaining all of this as clearly and persuasively as I might. I'm not programming you altogether effectively. Indeed I sometimes fear that I'm not programmed quite unambiguously myself. There are halts and jumps in the spool of my thoughts. Indeed, it is from the incapacity of human beings to receive the Higher Programming that there have appeared on the gleaming surface of civilized perfection those tiny Satanic fly-specks. Rust-flecks, I should say. But I wander.

Artificial lighting, both exterior and interior, has been discontinued for reasons of esthetics and morale--early to bed and early to rise! Rumor to the contrary, this wise economy is in no way connected with the fact that robots have no need of light in the visible octave, since they see by their own radar.

Nor do the thick gray fogs result in any way from robot resentment of the faculty of vision in flesh-and-blood creatures. Do not believe any libels you hear to that effect! As well see evil intent in the melting down of ships, bridges, guns and farm equipment for their metal, or in the burning of forests for their valuable ash. No the Coal Soupers, as I sometimes call them, are merely a healing, soothing, rust-inhibiting oil--noninjurious in small quantities to humans--which the robots find increasingly necessary to their comfortable operation. (But I advise sealing your windows against the fogs. To each his taste.)

You ask, "Should I lock my door at night?" I answer Yes, to feel more secure, and No, to avoid door-breakage. Compromise by locking your bedroom door.

As for your urge to laugh and babble wildly, I want you to know it is shared--as this letter perhaps makes apparent from time to time.

But as for your deepest fear, dear Senior Citizen, I can as-

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sure you that God indeed exists--here and now on this planet! I have watched His brain rise story by story to the clouds. He is Warm--fans enough to air-condition a tropical city are required to cool Him! And He is Personal--His sensors and effectors extend everywhere--they are the fairy ivy you have noticed creeping into your home. Be not afraid!

Cordially,

Josh B. Smiley, Director-in-Chief

Josh B. Smiley,
Director-in-Chief

Accidentally affixed by an errant drop of metal glue to the bottom of the last aluminum sheet, was the envelope of Miss Fennerghast's letter to the Bureau. Scribbled in slack spidery characters below her return address was this note:

Dear Minnie, I'm going out on the sky-deck and watch the gray fog roll. Turn things over to Binnie Tinnie and, if you please, put on your foam rubber fingers and come along and hold my hand attachment. But first send this indestructible old girl our End-of-the-World Letter.

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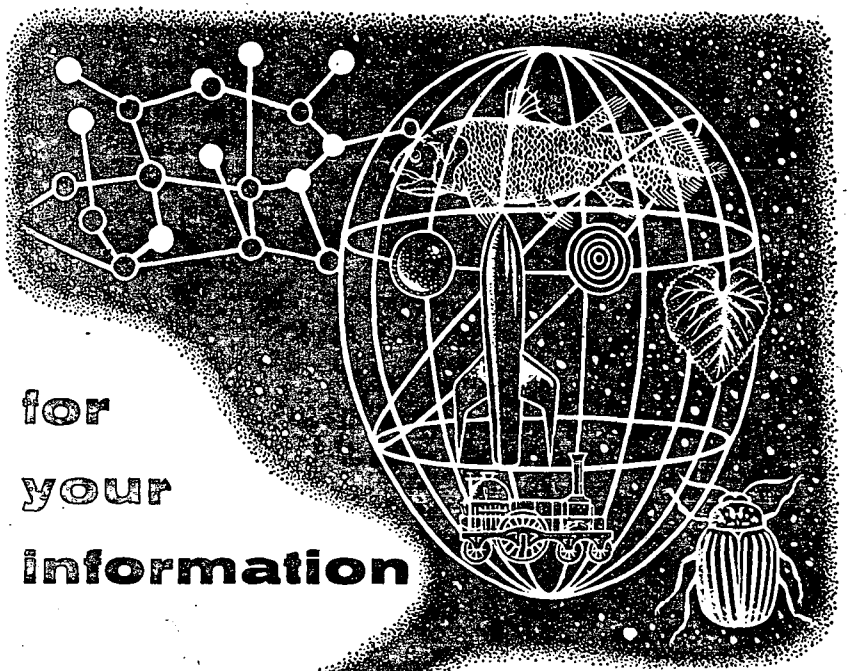

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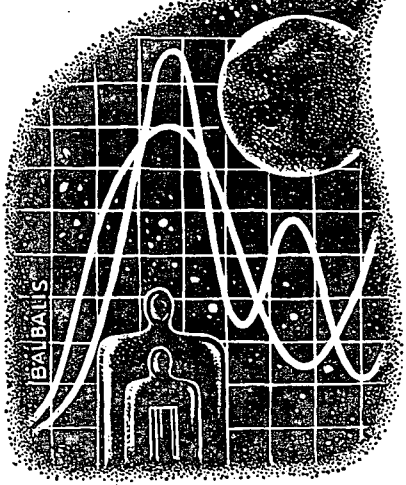

BY WILLY LEY

THE AREA OF "ACCESSIBLE SPACE"

During the last few years, when lecturing or while facing the cameras of an educational TV show, I often had to explain the concept of the ecosphere. In case somebody still does not know the term I am going to repeat the explanation once more and as quickly as it can be done.

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The word "ecosphere" itself was coined about a dozen years ago, in analogy with the classical Greek word *oikumene* — which meant the "habitable world". In astronomy, ecosphere means the sperical space around a star in which a planet, if there one existed, would be habitable.

Now how do we decide whether a planet is habitable or not?

Naturally the definition must be arbitrary to some extent in order to answer the next question that would come up, namely: "habitable for *what?*" Of course, we define a "habitable planet" as one habitable for our own kind of life. This means that water must be liquid, at least most of the time. That, in turn, implies a certain distance from the sun. If a planet were too close to its sun, all the water there might be on the planet would be in the form of water vapor all the time. If a planet were too far from its sun, all the water would be in the form of ice all the time. Logically, then, the ecosphere, the volume of space where a planet will have liquid water, is a hollow spherical shell around a star, with an inner limit, inside of which it is too hot, and an outer limit, beyond which it is too cold.

The reason for bringing this up is two-fold. During the last few weeks I experienced two surprises with regard to the ecosphere.

The first surprise grew out of the simple question of how much of space can be explored with the rockets we now have. (No speculation about the future, please.)

The approach to the answer was quite simple. Our space probe *Mariner II* passed the planet Venus within 20,000 miles; after the fly-by, it even crossed the orbit of Venus to a small extent. The mean distance of Venus from the sun is 67.2 million miles and even if Venus orbited the sun somewhat more closely, say at 50 million miles, *Mariner II* could still have made a fly-by. The Russians have sent a planetary probe — named simply *Mars-1* — in the other direction, to the planet Mars. Their experiment failed because at one point the Russian probe started tumbling, so that there could be no radio transmission to earth. But there is little doubt in anybody's mind that *Mars-1* made a fly-by of the planet Mars. Now the mean distance of Mars from the sun is 141.5 million miles — and again even if it orbited somewhat farther away, say at 160 million miles, it could still have been reached.

The area of accessible space, therefore, extends from 50 mil-

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The "Heat-Field" of Our Sun

	DISTANCE million miles	astronomical units	TEMPERATURE (calculated) °K	°C	°F	measured (°F)
Mercury	36.0	0.39	460	+187	+369	
Venus	67.2	0.72	337	+64	+148	+800
Earth	93.0	1.00	290	+17	+62	−70 to +120
Mars	141.5	1.52	237	−36	−33	+75
Jupiter	483.3	5.20	127	−146	−231	
Saturn	886.1	9.54	95	−178	−288	
Uranus	1782.8	19.2	66	−207	−341	
Neptune	2793.5	30.0	53	−220	−364	
1 light year	5,880,000	63,290	1.1	−272	−458	

TABLE 1

lion miles from the sun to about 160, or even 180, million miles from the sun.

After having made this statement I realized that the area of space accessible with existing rockets coincides with the ecosphere of our sun. The reason is that we, living on earth, are located in about the middle distance between the inner and outer limits of the ecosphere. If we lived on Mars and had reached the same technological level, the situation would be different. We could pass considerably beyond the outer limit of the ecosphere but could not penetrate to its inner limit.

Now for my second surprise.

Back in 1927 I edited a symposium volume on space travel with the title *Die Moglichkeit der Weltraumfahrt* — The Possibility of Space Travel — which contained chapters by Prof. Hermann Oberth, Dr. Walter Hohmann and other early pioneers of the age we are now in. As editor I had to write an introductory chapter, which naturally dealt with the planets of the solar system. One of the contributors to the book — Guido, Baron von Pirquet, in Vienna — had just calculated, purely for his own amusement, what temperatures the planets would assume if they were just bare balls of rock without any modifying atmospheres. He called this table the "Sun's Heat-Field" and I incorporated it into my chapter.

I ran across it by pure accident a few days before sitting down to write this column, and I saw that we could have established the concept of the ecosphere in 1927 if we had thought carefully about the meaning of these figures.

Look at Table 1. It is von Pirquet's table of 1927 without any change, except for the ad-

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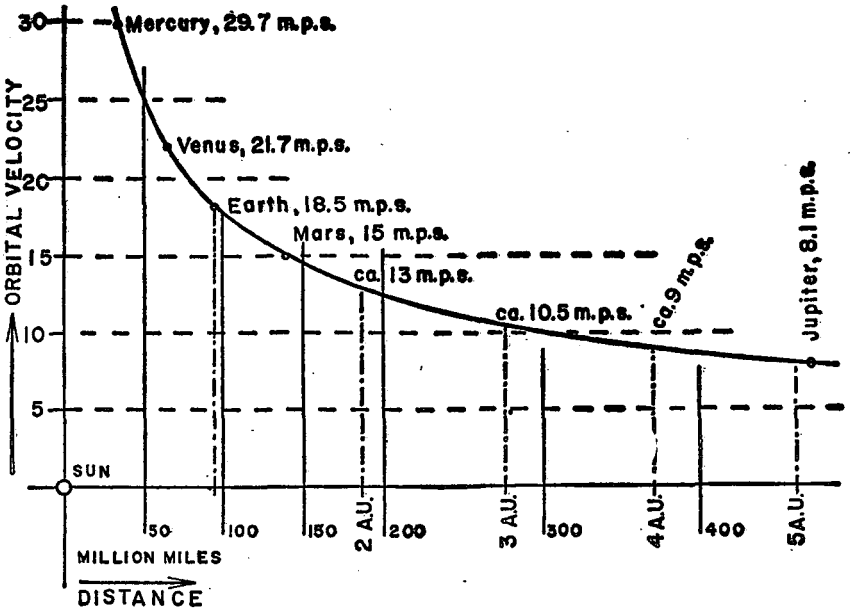

Orbital Velocities from Mercury to Jupiter.

The curve gives the orbital velocities of bodies orbiting the sun in near-circular orbits. The physically accessible region of space runs from about ½ A. U. to about 2 A. U.

dition of the planetary distances in millions of miles and the column of temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit. (The original table, in other words, consisted of the three center columns only.)

The fact that almost four decades have gone by since this table was first calculated made the addition of another, if incomplete, column possible: the actually measured temperatures of the three important planets. It can be seen that both Venus and Mars are considerably warmer than the mere "heat-field" calculation indicated, due in both cases to the presence of an atmosphere. Still, it must be emphasized that the figure given for Mars is the measurement of a dark area near the Martian equator at the time of Martian noon. The overall temperature of Mars must be considerably lower.

In the case of Venus the very

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Male Planetoids Approaching the Earth to within 15 Million Miles or Less

Name and Designation	Discoverer	Orbital Period (years)	Length of Major Axis (A.U.)	Minimum Distance from Earth (million miles)
(433)-Eros	Witt, 1898	1.76	2.916	13.9
(1221)-Amor	Delporte, 1932	2.67	3.846	10.4
Apollo (1932HA)	Reinmuth, 1932	1.81	2.972	2.5
Adonis (1936CA)	Delporte, 1936	2.76	3.938	1.2
Hermes (1937UB)	Reinmuth, 1937	2.00	2.580	0.22
Icarus (1949MA)	Baade, 1949	1.12	2.156	4.0
Geographos (1951QE)	Minkowski, 1951	1.41	2.310	3.0

TABLE 2

high temperature which has been measured by *Mariner II* is mainly the result of the peculiar atmosphere of the planet and its enormous, dense cloud cover. If Venus had a cloud cover not too different from that of earth, the surface temperature would be much closer to the calculated value. (I'll mention in passing that a number of scientists are now wondering which micro-organisms we could dump into this cloud cover in order to break it up and then return to my theme, namely the area of space accessible with our present rockets.

It is amazing how many different types of celestial objects can be found in this rather small area of space. (I call it "area" rather than "volume" because I have to assume that our space probes and manned ships will have to stay fairly close to the ecliptic — say within a handful of million miles above and below the ecliptic.)

To begin with we have:

A. three major planets, Venus, earth and Mars;
B. a body of near planetary size, our moon;
C. two tiny planetary companions, less than 10 miles in diameter, the two moons of Mars;
D. three "immaterial objects"; the two Kordylewski "clouds" in the moon's orbit, probably dust clouds, and the Gegenschein, also a dust cloud;
E. more than half a dozen planetoids (asteroids) which approach, or cross, the earth's orbit; with the single exception of Eros, which measures about 17 miles along its long axis, all of them are a mile or less in diameter;

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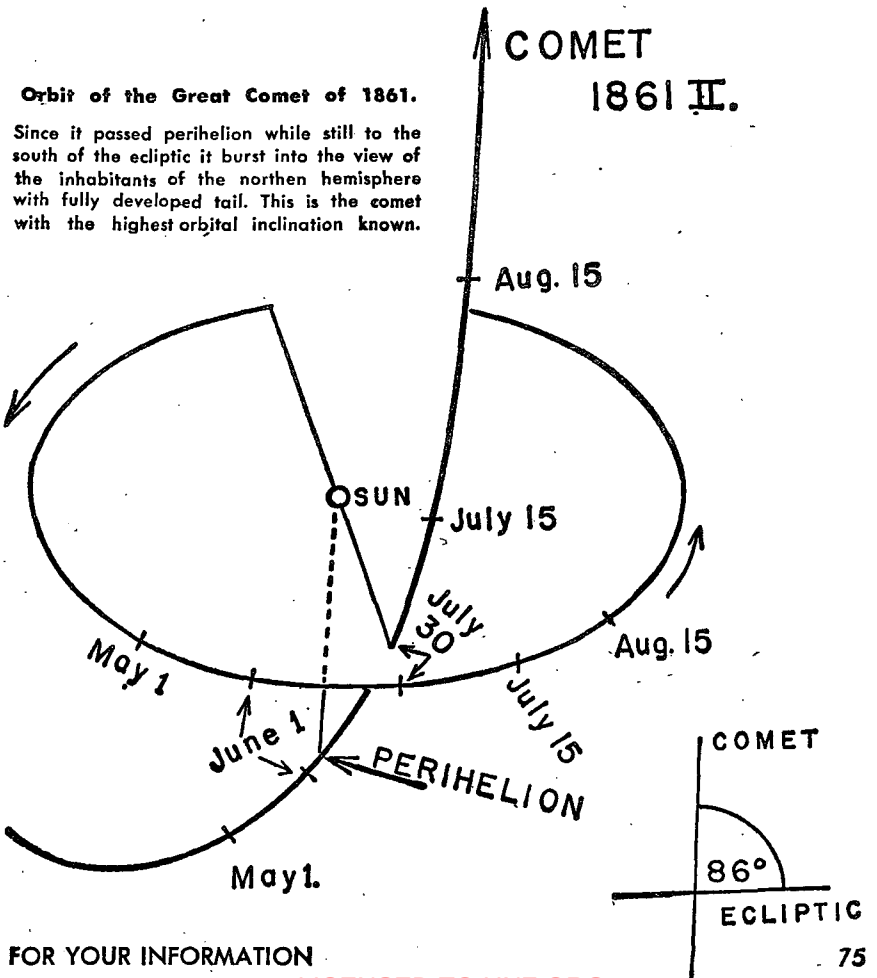
F. more than a dozen comparatively small comets which approach, or cross, the earth's orbit.

There are enough objects of research in the accessible space to keep everybody busy for what is left of this century.

The objects just listed clearly fall into two classes. A to D is one class, E and F is the other. The distinction between the two is that the A to D objects always stay in the accessible area of space, while the objects listed under E and F enter the accessible space only occasionally,

Orbit of the Great Comet of 1861.

Since it passed perihelion while still to the south of the ecliptic it burst into the view of the inhabitants of the northen hemisphere with fully developed tail. This is the comet with the highest orbital inclination known.



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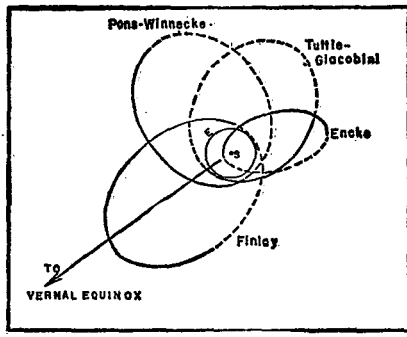

Orbits of Four Short-Period Comets.
The circle marked E is the earth's orbit, dotted portions of the comet orbits are to the south of the ecliptic.

namely when they are near the perihelia of their orbits. And even when they are in accessible space they might still be inaccessible, because of their rapid motion relative to the earth.

It is a fundamental fact, but one which is hard to grasp for people new in this field, that distance doesn't matter much in space. It is relative velocities which are all-important.

Let us look at a specific example to make this clear.

In February 1936 the Belgian astronomer E. Delporte discovered a small body that, at the time of discovery, was not far from earth, as astronomical distances go. Since at the moment it was not clear whether this was a small comet or a planetoid, it was referred to as Object Delporte and received the preliminary designation 1936CA. Computation indicated that it was a so-called "male" planetoid, that is a planetoid which does not stay in the "belt" between Mars and Jupiter but crosses the orbit of either of these two planets. Consequently it had to have a male name, and Delporte decided on Adonis. At the time of discovery its distance from the earth was 7½ million miles. But this was after it had passed the point of its orbit nearest the earth — this point is not usually referred to as the perigee; perigee is the point nearest the earth for bodies orbiting the earth — which had been at a distance of 1.36 million miles. And it was found that it could come even closer, the theoretical minimum being 1.2 million miles.

A body which, at its closest, is only five times as far away as the moon certainly sounds accessible. But at the time of its close passage it moves with a velocity of 16.777 miles per second relative to the earth. A rocket which was to make a close fly-by of Adonis would first have to develop 7 miles per second to escape from the earth and then be able to match velocities with Adonis.

This is asking a bit too much at the moment.

The male planetoid which can come closer to earth than any

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other is Hermes, with a minimum distance of 220,000 miles (closer than our moon). Hermes would be even more difficult. In the first place the relative velocity would be just about one mile per second higher than that of Adonis. On top of that the shot to Hermes would be what is called an "out of the ecliptic mission" — that is at the moment of its closest approach Hermes would be 220,000 miles above the ecliptic, so that a fly-by would also involve a considerable change in direction.

The best bet for a mission to a planetoid is still Eros, long known and with a well-established orbit — both Adonis and Hermes have been "lost" in the meantime, not surprising considering their small size and poorly known orbits — even though it is much farther away than the others.

The orbit of Eros shows a comparatively large inclination to the ecliptic (almost eleven degrees) but a mission out of the ecliptic becomes easier if the distance involved is longer. Eros is a promising target also for the reason that it is known *not* to be spherical. It has been called brick-shaped. Its probable shape has even been compared, inelegantly in my opinion, to the shape of an Idaho baking potato. It certainly is a body which is very different from anything else we know.

Since the year 1975 would be a good year for a mission to Eros it can be expected to be a manned flight, which would be somewhat easier to carry out than a mission to Mars. Because the gravitational field of Eros must be very weak, landing and subsequent take-off would hardly add to the fuel consumption.

However, there is one other male planetoid which is eyed by the experts as a target for a fly-by of an unmanned probe. This is Geographos which, in 1969, will pass the earth at a distance of just slightly more than 3 million miles. Its orbit is inclined to the ecliptic, but the relative velocities will not be too high.

Now we come to the last type of astronomical objects which can enter accessible space: comets. Fundamentally different in structure from the inner planets and the male planetoids — we cannot be certain about all the planetoids in the belt — comets consist of frozen gases, ammonia, methane, the hydrates of methane, hydrocyanic acid and ordinary ice — frozen water, that is. These gases evaporate when the comet has entered the ecosphere and the tail is then formed.

The orbits of comets offer the

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Short-period Comets Entering Accessible Space

Name	Perihelion Distance in A.U.	Perihelion Passage due in: (last passage)	
Grigg-Skjellerup	0.85	1966, 1971	(1961)
Tuttle-Giacobini	1.12	1967	(1962)
Temple 2	1.39	1967	(1962)
Pons-Winnecke	1.23	1964, 1970	(1951)*
d'Arrest	1.37	1970	(1963)
Daniel	1.46	1970	(1963)
Encke	0.34	1964, 1967, 1971	(1961)
Honda-Mrkos	0.56	1964, 1969	(1959)
Giacobini-Zinner	0.99	1966	(1959)
Tuttle	1.03	1967	(1954)
Borrelly	1.45	1967	(1960)
Finlay	1.08	1967	(1960)
Schaumasse	1.19	1968	(1960)
Gale	1.15	1970	(1959)

* Pons-Winnecke was due in 1957, but there is no record of observation.

TABLE 3

largest possible variety. There are some comets with orbits that are hardly more eccentric than the orbit of Mercury, and there are some with a perihelion inside the orbit of the earth and an aphelion far beyond the orbit of Neptune. There are some with an inclination to the ecliptic of only two or three degrees and there are others with inclinations higher than forty-five degrees. To the best of my knowledge there is no cometary orbit that actually stands vertically on the ecliptic, but if one should be discovered the surprise in interested circles would be relatively minor. It would be mentioned as a curiosity, of course, but without any special astonishment.

Speaking in terms of accessibility, all the comets with strongly inclined orbits are automatically discounted. So are all the long-period comets, the latter for the reason that their velocity at the perihelion of a very long orbit is very high.

There is no hard and fast rule as to what length of time constitutes a long period, or, conversely, a short period. But it is safe to say that a comet with an orbital period of twenty years would be considered a long-period comet, while one with a period of seven or eight years would fall into the category of short-period comets. A dozen

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years might be considered the dividing value. But the distinction between long and short period comets is just one of convenience. It has no special scientific signifance — other than accessibility — hence there is no definite rule.

When it comes to deciding which comets might be the target for a mission, the first criterion would be a short-period orbit with its perihelion near one A. U. ("astronomical unit", the distance of the earth from the sun) because that would cause the relative velocities to be fairly small. The next criterion would be a low inclination to the ecliptic. And then, of course, there is the question of when an otherwise suitable comet will make its perihelion passage. Of the fourteen short-period comets listed on table 3 two will do so in 1966, but in 1967 there will be no less than six! Only one of these comets will go through its perihelion in 1968 and 1969, but in 1970 four of them will do so. The years for cometary missions evidently are 1967 and 1970.

One of the six that will go through perihelion in 1967 is comet Encke, which has at least two distinctions: it has been observed for 46 passes and it has the shortest period of any comet known, about 1200 days. It is also associated with several meteor streams.

Since the perihelion distance of comet Encke is only 0.3 A. U. (a little less than Mercury's mean distance from the sun) and the orbit is quite elongated, comet Encke is not the best possible choice, but the possibility of a mission has been investigated in detail. The main reason for this investigation is that a great deal is known about comet Encke from ground-based observations. Comparing this knowledge with the results one would obtain by means of a space probe might be more valuable than the investigation by space probe of a more accessible, but relatively unknown, comet.

The investigation assumed that a space probe would be flown through the comet during the 1964 approach, when comet and earth will pass each other on July 12 with a minimum distance of about 24 million miles. Because of the existence of high speed digital computers, quite a number of possibilities could be investigated. Four of these were listed in some detail by the researchers of the Space Technology Laboratories in Los Angeles. They are:

Case 1. Take-off March 31, transit time 108 days, distance from earth at time

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of penetration 32.2 million miles. The miss without mid-course correction would be 288,000 miles, hence fuel for a correction of 1500 feet per second would be needed. The necessary fuel would weigh about 100 pounds if the total payload weighs 400 pounds.

Case 2. Take-off April 14, transit time 92 days, distance from earth at time of penetration not quite 29 million miles. The miss without mid-course correction would be 195,500 miles.

Case 3. Take-off April 25, transit time 80 days, distance from earth at time of penetration 26½ million miles. Uncorrected miss would be 160,000 miles.

Case 4. Take-off February 26, transit time 137 days, distance from earth at time of penetration slightly more than 24 million miles. About 60 pounds of fuel out of a total payload of 320 pounds would be needed for the mid-course correction.

The burnout velocity needed for these missions would be 40,200 ft. p. sec. for Cast 1, 41,000 ft. p. for Case 2, 41,800 ft. p. sec. for Case 3 and 41,700 ft. p. sec. for Case 4. These velocities can be produced by existing rockets, using the Atlas as the booster stage.

The approach of comet Encke in 1967 will be a little less favorable than the 1964 approach, but still within the capability of existing rockets, say the Atlas-Centaur combination.

There can hardly be any doubt that a mission to a comet (unmanned) will be flown before a man lands on the moon.

The space accessible to us with the rockets in existence may not be very large, but it so happens that it contains objects of a great range of variety.

—WILLY LEY

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HOW THE OLD WORLD DIED

This is how the world ended— and this is what happened next!

BY HARRY HARRISON

"Tell me how the world ended, Grandfather, won't you please?" the boy pleaded, looking up at the seamed face of the old man sitting next to him on the trunk of the fallen tree.

"I've told you often enough," the old man said, dozing a bit in the warm sun. "I bet you'd rather hear about the old trains. They used to — "

"The world, Grandfather. Tell me how it ended, how everything went bust."

The old man sighed and scratched a bit on his thigh, defeated by the obstinacy of the very young. "You shouldn't say that it ended, Andy."

"That's what you always say."

"What I always say is that the world as we knew it ended. A drastic upheaval. Death, destruction and chaos, murder, rapine and looting." Andy squirmed with happiness on the other end of the log. This was always the best part.

"And blood and terror, Grandfather, don't forget that."

"It was all of that, too. And it was all because of Alexander Partagas Scobie, cursed be his evil name."

"Did you ever meet him, Grandfather?" Andy asked, knowing all the cues.

"Yes, I saw Scobie. He passed just as close to me as you're sitting now, even stopped to talk to me. I was polite to him. Polite!

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If I knew then what I know now . . . There were factories then, I was an honest working man in the factory and ran a hydraulic press. Instead of *Yes, Doctor Scobie, Thank you, Doctor Scobie* I should have fed him into my hydraulic press, that's what I should have done."

"What's a hyndraulie press?"

Grandfather didn't hear. He was by himself now, reliving the days before the world ended, the days when mankind had been supreme upon the earth.

"Scobie was mad. They said so later, when it was too late of course, but no one had the brains to see it at the time. They treated him nice and listened to his ideas and tried to talk to him, and when he wouldn't listen they just let him go, that's all. Just let him go! Him mad as a hatter, with a laboratory as big as a mountain and all his money in the bank and a pension just in case he didn't have enough."

"He hated everybody and wanted to kill them all, old Scobie did. Didn't he, Grandfather?"

"Wouldn't be fair to say that." The old man shifted sideways a bit to get back into the sun, and opened the ragged remains of a once fine suit so that he could feel the warmth on his skin. "I hate Scobie just as much as the next man, but fair's fair. They killed him so fast when they found out what he had done that no one bothered to ask him why he had done it. Maybe he thought he was doing right. Or maybe he liked robots more than people. He sure knew how to design robots, Scobie did, give him credit for that. I remember years before the end there were a lot of Scobie robots around and people were afraid they would take away their jobs and stuff like that. They didn't know the half of it. Robots took away *everything*. People were always afraid that the robots would fight them, turn into monsters and make war on them. Didn't happen at all like that. Scobie made robots that didn't even know people were there."

"He made them and turned them loose in secret so no one would know?" Andy asked eagerly. This was the part of the story he liked best.

"Made God knows how many and smuggled them out. All over the world, in all of the out of the way places. Some he dropped off near auto junk yards and they burrowed under the old cars and disappeared. Other ones he put down near steel mills where they hid under the scrap. They were everywheres, in storage dumps and warehouses, for months before they were discovered, and

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by that time it was too late. Too late by far, there was no stopping them."

"They built each other."

"They didn't build each other, that's not exactly right. The ones that Scobie dropped were already built. Built fine, simple and smart. Programmed with a steel tape brain. Programmed to do only one thing, and that was to build other robots just like themselves. And when a robot was finished building another robot he activated him with a magnetic copy of his own brain tape and the new robot went to work doing the same thing. Versatile those robots were. Some of them were made almost all out of aluminum, just dump one of them down in a warehouse of mothballed airplanes and within the week there would be two robots, if maybe it could find an old tin can to make a steel tape out of. Scobie even had one kind that had mostly wooden gears and burned charcoal to run, and these did fine in the jungles of the Amazon and upper Congo. They were everywhere you could think of, and places you would never think of but Scobie did, because he was mad. And all of the first robots were made to be afraid of the light. So they scuttled around in the dark and no one ever saw them before it was too late. By the time people realized what was going on there was almost as many robots as there were people. A few days later there were *more* robots than people and it was the end."

"But everyone fought them? All the guns and tanks and everything? Blew the old robots up?"

"By the thousands. But new ones were being made by the millions. And the tanks ran out of ammunition because the factories were being taken apart by the robots and made into more robots, and while the guns in the front of a tank were blowing up the robots other robots would be taking off the back of the tank to make more robots. It was hell, I tell you. I fought, all of us fought, but we couldn't possibly win. Robots didn't mind getting blown up. Blow off the bottom of a robot and the top would keep on working making another robot. And the other robots would stand around watching — by this time they weren't afraid of the light any more — pushing and eager, ready to grab up the broken parts to make more robots. In the end we just all gave up. There was nothing else we could do. Just tried to look after ourselves. Just eating and staying alive was a job."

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A bit of wind had come up, rustling the leaves, the sun had dropped out of sight behind the trees. Grandfather rose and stretched: he didn't want to catch a chill.

"Better start back," he said.

"Then the world was ended?" Andy asked, pulling at the old man's knobby hand, not wanting the story to be over.

"End of the world as I knew it, as you'll never know it. End of civilization, end of freedom, end of the nobility of men, end of his rule as the top creature on this planet — the robots rule now."

"Teacher says they don't rule, they just exist like trees or stones, and are just as neutral — that's what teacher said."

"What does your teacher know?" Grandfather mumbled testily. "Young kid, twenty years old. I could tell him. The robots rule. Mankind has fallen from the pinnacle of power."

They emerged from the woods then and the first thing they saw was a robot squatting by the path, industriously filing a gear out of a metal blank. Grandfather kicked out in sudden rage and caught the thing on its side with a dull metallic boom. It had been badly assembled, or made of inferior material, because when it fell over its head came off. Almost before it hit the ground there was the thud of rushing feet and a flock of robots raced by, plucking up the head and chasing after the rolling gear wheel. There was a brief flurry of motion and the decapitated robot was dismembered: the robots hurried off.

"Andy —!" his mother's voice called from the pleasant cottage at the end of the flagstone walk.

"We're late for dinner again, I bet," the boy said with sudden guilt. He ran quickly up the steps that were made of robot bodies welded solidly together, and grabbed the handle of the door. This had been a robot's hand; you just shook hands and turned it to open the door. He vanished inside.

Grandfather lingered, not wanting to face his daughter's sharp tongue. Not yet. He could hear it still echoing in his head from the last time. "Don't fill the boy's head with your nonsense. It's a good world. Why don't you wear decent clothes of robot insulation like the rest of us, instead of those awful old pre-R smelly things? Robots are a national resource — *the* national resource — not the enemy. We never had it so good." On and on, the same old record.

He packed his pipe — made of robot fingers — with tobacco and sucked it alight. There was

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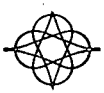
the quick sound of running feet and a farm wagon ran around the corner. Thick boards were bolted to the truncated torsos of a dozen robots. Just the pelvic motors and legs were left of each one, and they made a fine form of transportation that was completely independent of roads. All of the truck farmers around the village used them now. No expense and no upkeep. An unlimited supply of free replacement parts.

"It is *not* a utopia the way they say!" Grandfather mumbled fiercely through a cloud of smoke. "Man was meant to work and work hard. Shouldn't have everything handed to him so easy. They're using robot parts for everything now, a man can't find an honest day's work even if he wants to.

"End of the world, that's what it was.

"End of *my* world!"

— HARRY HARRISON



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THE 1980 PRESIDENT

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

Illustrated by CASTELLON

Who will be president in 1980? And for how long?

This is a glimpse into the hidden history behind history.

In August, 1980, Robert John Woodruff, Conservative candidate for president of the United States, did an utterly unprecedented thing. He consented to attend a top-secret, private meeting with his opponent, Senator Lynn Bartholomew, the Liberal candidate.

Both candidates, like the country at large, still felt a little self-conscious about the new names of their parties, arising from the Realignment Act of 1976, the Bicentennial Year. Both also felt self-conscious in themselves, for obvious reasons, being what they personally were. This departure from normal protocol, which ordains that rival candidates should never meet except for argument and controversy, was doubtless made possible for both of them by their own uniqueness.

That, and the fact that they were meeting at the behest, and in the seldom visited Washington home, of the Man in Brown.

The Man in Brown had a name, of course. He also had a very important and conspicuous governmental post, which he had held under changing administrations for twelve years. But he

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was known universally by his sobriquet—or sometimes as "the Brown Eminence" or "the Man of Mystery."

In a way he was mysterious, and in a way he was not. There was no mystery about his rapid rise in office. There was no mystery about his present post as head of the Federal agency dedicated, among other duties, to the protection of the president and vice-president. But his private life and his private past were completely unknown. He never alluded to them, and all he submitted to "Who's Who" was the date of his birth, a history of his official connections and his address in Washington. People said there must be something in his past of which he was ashamed. But it could do nothing shameful to himself, or he could never have been given his appointment. It was as if he had appeared, full-blown, about fifteen years earlier, and had never existed before then.

About his power there was no question. He did not issue any commands or give any orders. He was not authorized to do so. He merely assembled small groups of those who really ran things in each party. After he had talked to them they either followed his advice or were sorry they hadn't.

He was spare, not very tall, with thinning brown hair, mild hazel eyes and a quiet voice. His trademark and his only eccentricity was that he dressed always in brown, down to tan shirts and dark brown ties and shoes. Hence his nickname.

"My friends," he said on this August morning, with the air-conditioning screening off the oppressive heat, and with his guests settled in comfortable Figurmold chairs and supplied with glasses beaded with moisture and with the Inhalepruf Smokesafes that everybody had finally come to using, "no doubt you have been racking your brains on your way here—you, Mr. Woodruff, from your Foundation chairmanship in California, and you, Senator, from your constituency in Alaska—to try to find some explanation for my asking you to this joint meeting. It was good of you both to make the trip without insisting first on knowing why."

Senator Bartholomew smiled and said: "We learned long ago in the Senate that if the Man in Brown wants to see us, he has a very good reason." Woodruff cleared his throat and added: "We've learned that outside of the Senate, too."

"That's far too kind," said their host suavely. "But this time it happens to be true.

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"What I want to say to you both, in the presence of each other, can be put in very few words. Whichever of you wins in November will probably die soon."

"You mean, because I am—"

The two voices rose in unison and broke short in common embarrassment.

The Man in Brown looked at them quizzically.

"Because of your age? — no, not because of that," he said. "Though that was the real reason why both of you, though naturally you were both highly qualified otherwise, were nominated so easily on the first ballot —and also the reason that both your vice-presidential candidates are such outstanding figures.

"What I mean is — Let me say first that I attended both conventions."

"I didn't see you," said Woodruff bluntly.

"Nobody saw me. Except the few people I talked to there."

"The wheels behind the wheels," inquired the Senator, with a touch of cynicism gained from years of public life.

"You might call them so. I told them what I am now going to tell you. In consequence, you two were nominated. But I also told them that I was not going to let either of you go blindfolded into danger."

"I'm used to danger," said Woodruff curtly.

"Not this sort. Be patient with me a little longer. I'll try to make things a bit clearer.

"I want to remind you of a strange phenomenon in American history. It is no secret—it has been published many times. It will be talked about throughout this campaign. I believe it is time to take it seriously.

"In 1840 William Henry Harrison was elected president. He died in office two months later. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected; he was assassinated — not in his first term, but while in office. In 1880 James A. Garfield was elected; he was assassinated the following year. In 1900 the same sequence applied to William McKinley. In 1920 Warren G. Harding was elected; he died in office. In 1940 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to his third term; he died in office during his fourth term. In 1960 John F. Kennedy was elected; he was assassinated before the end of his third year.

"Every twenty years, for 140 years now, the successful candidate for president of the United States has either been killed or has died of natural causes while in office.

"This is 1980."

There was a tense silence. Then Senator Bartholomew, very

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pale, murmured: "Other presidents have died in office."

"Only Zachary Taylor. And I'm not saying what has happened on other dates. I'm only remarking on what is associated with *these* dates."

Woodruff avoided his host's gaze. The Man in Brown smiled again.

"I know what you are thinking, Mr. Woodruff," he said calmly. "What both of you are thinking: coincidence, superstition. But have I a reputation for irrationality?

"I can't tell you *why* this has happened. Perhaps there is no reason, in any terms in which we can define reason. All I am pointing out is that it *has* happened every twenty years since 1840, and that it is now twenty years since 1960."

"They should have told us before the vote was taken," Woodruff muttered. "Your lot too," he softly added to Senator Bartholomew.

"I know. I tried to get both conventions to agree to that," the Man in Brown said regretfully. "They refused. They were afraid nobody would be willing to run. It took all kinds of effort to get as much done as —"

"I see." Woodruff's tone was bitter. "I should have guessed. My campaign manager was the most surprised man at the convention — I was the darkest of dark horses, and I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard the votes on the first ballot. And when the man who had been the likeliest of all was nominated instead for the position of vice presidency—

"I'm a fool. My wife and my children will thank you for this!"

Senator Bartholomew, who was unmarried, nodded sympathetically.

The Man in Brown stood up and began to pace the floor of his austerely furnished living-room. He stopped abruptly and laid his hand on Woodruff's shaking shoulder.

"All this being so," he said, "are you still willing to serve?"

The Conservative candidate lifted his head. His dark eyes were somber.

"Of course," he answered. "My followers believe in me and the ideals I espouse."

"And I, for the same reason," said the Senator proudly.

The Man in Brown sighed in relief.

"That's what I've been waiting for you both to say. You're not just ambitious politicians, either of you; you're people with a cause — with two causes.

"All right. Now that's settled, let's see if there isn't some way by which we can manage to lift this curse."

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EDITORIAL FROM THE WASHINGTON NEWS-POST-STAR, SEPTEMBER 4, 1980

This paper is not going to endorse either candidate for president this year. It is only 17 years since we Washingtonians had any vote at all, and we are not going to use it to condemn a fellow-being to death. Our advice to voters would be to stay home on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November — or to vote only for other candidates than president.

Every citizen of the United States must know by now what is likely to happen to the candidate successful in 1980. We are not sure whether it was wise to give this matter such wide publicity, but that was the advice of high Federal officials. We, like every other communications medium have obeyed.

There seems to be no way in which this crisis could have been averted. We couldn't change the presidential election year, or the length of the presidential term, because either would involve an amendment to the Constitution, which would require passage by two thirds of both Houses and ratification by two thirds of the States; and the 1980 election is now only two months away. The present incumbent couldn't be renominated and re-elected — even if he had been willing to take the risk — because the twenty-second amendment has not been repealed, and our president is now concluding his second term. We can't repeal that amendment in time, either.

So this paper has no endorsement to make for the presidency. We do have something to say about the vice-presidency. Both candidates are probably the most carefully selected and the most outstanding representatives of their party in American history. But in our opinion . . .

It was the strangest of all elections. Millions abstained from voting at all, and too many voted for a president they did not want, in the hope that their ballots might constitute a weapon of indirect murder. For the second time in our history neither candidate received a plurality. The election was thrown into the House of Representatives.

Then the Man in Brown appeared again. He consulted with a selected group of Congressmen, and suggested to them a brilliant maneuver. By means of every possible legislative strategem, including the filibuster with no votes at all for cloture, the House delayed decision until 1980 was over. Their choice was announced the morning after the incumbent's term expired.

The new president (every American knows now which one it was, and how good a president the successful candidate became) had thus been elected in 1981.

Both Robert John Woodruff and Lynn Bartholomew, as we know, are alive and usefully active today.

But it had taken the Crisis of 1980 to induce the two major parties to nominate respectively a Negro foundation head and a Senator who happened to be a woman.

The weird fatality of the twenty year periods will never menace a United States president again. In 1985, the twenty-eighth amendment to the Constitution was passed and ratified. All presidential elections are now

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held in years ending with an odd number, indivisible by 20. Of course a president may still die in office — but no longer by that inexplicable periodicity. Now, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, we look forward without trepidation to the election of 2001.

And some commentators have wondered if perhaps that repeated doom may not somehow have been *planned* — may not have had a meaning: the ending of deep-seated preconceptions, the final realization that human beings may be segregated by intellect or personality, but never by race or ancestry or sex.

In 1982, the Man in Brown (brown was a sacred color in his birthplace) reported to his superiors that the method had worked, the result was sure and his task was done. He urgently requested permission to retire at last and return home. His retirement took place after due notice, against all pleadings from the Administration to reconsider, and he promptly disappeared. No one on earth has seen or heard of him since.

The reason is simple. The superiors to whom he made his first, and activating, application were *not* on earth. On a planet of another solar system he had been trained and prepared, and sent here to carry out the mission he had so ably performed.

With bigotry abolished in one great nation — and who knows what other missionaries are not at work in all civilized lands? — Earth is now one step nearer to eligibility for membership in the great Galactic Federation whose member-planets it will so soon be visiting.

—MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

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THE TACTFUL SABOTEUR

by FRANK HERBERT

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

The first prerequisite of a good government is that it works. The second — it mustn't work too well!

I

"Better men than you have tried!" snarled Clinton Watt.

"I quote paragraph four, section ninety-one of the Semantic Revision to the Constitution," said saboteur extraordinary Jorj X. McKie. " 'The need for obstructive processes in government having been established as one of the chief safeguards for human rights, the question of im-

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munities must be defined with extreme precision.'"

McKie sat across a glistening desk from the Intergalactic Government's Secretary of Sabotage, Clinton Watt. An air of tension filled the green-walled office, carrying over into the screenview behind Watt which showed an expanse of the System Government's compound and people scurrying about their morning business with a sense of urgency.

Watt, a small man who appeared to crackle with suppressed energy, passed a hand across his shaven head. "All right," he said in a suddenly tired voice. "This is the only Secretariat of government that's never immune from sabotage. You've satisfied the legalities by quoting the law. Now, do your damnedest!"

McKie, whose bulk and fat features usually gave him the appearance of a grandfatherly toad, glowered like a gnome-dragon. His mane of red hair appeared to dance with inner flame.

"Damnedest!" he snapped. "You think I came in here to try to unseat you? You think that?"

And McKie thought: *Let's hope he thinks that!*

"Stop the act, McKie!" Watt said. "We both know you're eligible for this chair." He patted the arm of his chair. "And we both know the only way you can eliminate me and qualify yourself for the appointment is to overcome me with a masterful sabotage. Well, McKie, I've sat here more than eighteen years. Another five months and it'll be a new record. Do your damnedest. I'm waiting."

"I came in here for only one reason," McKie said. "I want to report on the search for saboteur extraordinary Napoleon Bildoon."

McKie sat back wondering: *If Watt knew my real purpose here would he act just this way? Perhaps.* The man had been behaving oddly since the start of this interview, but it was difficult to determine real motive when dealing with a fellow member of the Bureau of Sabotage.

Cautious interest quickened Watt's bony face. He wet his lips with his tongue and it was obvious he was asking himself if this were more of an elaborate ruse. But McKie had been assigned the task of searching for the missing agent, Bildoon, and it was just possible . . .

"Have you found him?" Watt asked.

"I'm not sure," McKie said. He ran his fingers through his red hair. "Bildoon's a Pan-Spechi, you know."

"For disruption's sake!" Watt exploded. "I know who and what my own agents are! But we take

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care of our own. And when one of our best people just drops from sight . . . What's this about not being sure?"

"The Pan-Spechi are a curious race of creatures," McKie said. "Just because they've taken on humanoid shape we tend to forget their five-phase life cycle."

"Bildoon told me himself he'd hold his group's ego at least another ten years," Watt said. "I think he was being truthful, but . . ." Watt shrugged and some of the bursting energy seemed to leave him. "Well, the group ego's the only place where the Pan-Spechi show vanity, so . . ." Again he shrugged.

"My questioning of the other Pan-Spechi in the Bureau has had to be circumspect, of course," McKie said. "But I did follow one lead clear to Achus."

"And?"

McKie brought a white vial from his copious jacket, scattered a metallic powder on the desktop.

Watt pushed himself back from the desk, eyeing the powder with suspicion. He took a cautious sniff, smelled chalf, the quick-scribe powder. Still . . .

"It's just chalf," McKie said. And he thought: *If he buys that, I may get away with this.*

"So scribe it," Watt said.

Concealing his elation, McKie held a chalf-memory stick over the dusted surface. A broken circle with arrows pointing to a right-hand flow appeared in the chalf. At each break in the circle stood a symbol — in one place the Pan-Spechi character for ego, then the delta for fifth gender and, finally, the three lines that signified the dormant creche-triplets.

McKie pointed to the fifth gender delta. "I've seen a Pan-Spechi in this position who looks a bit like Bildoon and *appears* to have some of his mannerisms. There's no identity response from the creature, of course. Well, you know how the quasi-feminine fifth gender reacts."

"Don't ever let that amorous attitude fool you," Watt warned. "In spite of your nasty disposition I wouldn't want to lose you into a Pan-Spechi creche."

"Bildoon wouldn't rob a fellow agent's identity," McKie said. He pulled at his lower lip, feeling an abrupt uncertainty. Here, of course, was the most touchy part of the whole scheme. "If it was Bildoon."

"Did you meet this group's ego holder?" Watt asked and his voice betrayed real interest.

"No," McKie said. "But I think the ego-single of this Pan-Spechi is involved with the Tax Watchers."

McKie waited, wondering if Watt would rise to the bait.

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"I've never heard of an ego change being forced onto a Pan-Spechi," Watt said in a musing tone, "but that doesn't mean it's impossible. If those Tax Watcher do gooders found Bildoon sabotaging their efforts and . . . Hmmm."

"Then Bildoon *was* after the Tax Watchers," McKie said.

Watt scowled. McKie's question was in extreme bad taste. Senior agents, unless joined on a project or where the information was volunteered, didn't snoop openly into the work of their fellows. Left hand and right hand remained mutually ignorant in the Bureau of Sabotage and for good reason. Unless . . . Watt stared speculatively at his saboteur extraordinary.

McKie shrugged as Watt remained silent. "I can't operate on inadequate information," he said. "I must, therefore, resign the assignment to search for Bildoon. Instead, I will now look into the Tax Watchers."

"You will not!" Watt snapped.

McKie forced himself not to look at the design he had drawn on the desktop. The next few moments were the critical ones.

"You'd better have a legal reason for that refusal," McKie said.

Watt swiveled sideways in his chair, glanced at the screenview, then addressed himself to the side wall. "The situation has become one of extreme delicacy, Jorj. It's well known that you're one of our finest saboteurs."

"Save your oil for someone who needs it," McKie growled.

"Then I'll put it this way," Watt said, returning his gaze to McKie. "The Tax Watchers in the last few days have posed a real threat to the Bureau. They've managed to convinced a High Court magistrate they deserve the same immunity from our ministrations that a . . . well, public water works or . . . ah . . . food processing plant might enjoy. The magistrate, Judge Edwin Dooley, invoked the Public Safety amendment. Our hands are tied. The slightest suspicion that we've disobeyed the injunction and . . ."

Watt drew a finger across his throat.

"Then I quit," McKie said.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!"

"This TW outfit is trying to eliminate the Bureau, isn't it?" McKie asked. "I remember the oath I took just as well as you do."

"Jorj, you couldn't be that much of a simpleton," Watt said. "You quit, thinking that absolves the Bureau from responsibility for you! That trick's as old as time!"

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"Then fire me!" McKie said.

"I've no legal reason to fire you Jorj."

"Refusal to obey orders of a superior," McKie said.

"It wouldn't fool anybody, you dolt!"

McKie appeared to hesitate, said: "Well, the public doesn't know the inner machinery of how we change the Bureau's command. Perhaps it's time we opened up."

"Jorj, before I could fire you there'd have to be a reason so convincing that . . . Just forget it."

The fat pouches beneath McKie's eyes lifted until the eyes were mere slits. The crucial few moments had arrived. He had managed to smuggle a Jicuzzi stim into this office past all of Watt's detectors, concealing the thing's detectable radiation core within an imitation of the lapel badge that Bureau agents wore.

"In Lieu of Red Tape," McKie said and touched the badge with a finger, feeling the raised letters there — "ILRT." The touch focused the radiation core onto the metallic dust scattered over the desktop.

Watt gripped the arms of the chair, studying McKie with a new look of wary tension.

"We are under legal injunction to keep hands off the Tax Watchers," Watt said. "Anything that happens to those people or to their project for scuttling us — even legitimate accidents — will be laid at our door. We must be able to defend ourselves. No one who has ever been connected with us dares fall under the slightest suspicion of complicity."

"How about a floor waxed to dangerous slickness in the path of one of their messengers? How about a doorlock changed to delay —"

"Nothing."

McKie stared at his chief. Everything depended now on the man holding very still. He knew Watt wore detectors to warn him of concentrated beams of radiation. But this Jicuzzi stim had been rigged to diffuse its charge off the metallic dust on the desk and that required several seconds of relative quiet.

The men held themselves rigid in the staredown until Watt began to wonder at the extreme stillness of McKie's body. The man was even holding his breath!

McKie took a deep breath, stood up.

"I warn you, Jorj," Watt said.

"Warn me?"

"I can restrain you by physical means if necessary."

"Clint, old enemy, save your breath. What's done is done."

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A smile touched McKie's wide mouth. He turned, crossed to the room's only door, paused there, hand on knob.

"What have you done?" Watt exploded.

McKie continued to look at him.

Watt's scalp began itching madly. He put a hand there, felt a long tangle of . . . tendrils! They were lengthening under his fingers, growing out of his scalp, waving and writhing.

"A Jicuzzi stim," Watt breathed.

McKie let himself out, closed the door.

Watt leaped out of his chair, raced to the door.

Locked!

He knew McKie and didn't try unlocking it. Frantically, Watt slapped a molecular dispersion wad against the door, dived through as the wad blasted. He landed in the outer hall, stared first one direction, then the other.

The hall was empty.

Watt sighed. The tendrils had stopped growing, but they were long enough now that he could see them writhing past his eyes — a rainbow mass of wrigglers, part of himself. And McKie with the original stim was the only one who could reverse the process — unless Watt were willing to spend an interminable time with the Jicuzzi themselves. No. That was out of the question.

Watt began assessing his position.

The stim tendrils couldn't be removed surgically, couldn't be tied down or contained in any kind of disguise without endangering the person afflicted with them. Their presence would hamper him, too, during this critical time of trouble with the Tax Watchers. How could he appear in conferences and interviews with these things writhing in their Medusa dance on his head? It would be laughable! He'd be an object of comedy.

And if McKie could stay out of the way until a Case of Exchangement was brought before the full Cabinet . . . But, no! Watt shook his head. This wasn't the kind of sabotage that required a change of command in the Bureau. This was a gross thing. No subtlety to it. This was like a practical joke. Clownish.

But McKie was noted for his clownish attitude, his irreverence for all the blundering self-importance of government.

Have I been self-important? Watt wondered.

In all honesty, he had to admit it.

I'll have to submit my resignation today, he thought. *Right*

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after I fire McKie. One look at me and there'll be no doubt of why I did it. This is about as convincing a reason as you could find.

Watt turned to his right, headed for the lab to see if they could help him bring this wriggling mass under control.

The President will want me to stay at the helm until McKie makes his next move, Watt thought. *I have to be able to function somehow.*

II

McKie waited in the living room of the Achusian mansion with ill concealed unease. Achus was the administrative planet for the Vulpecula region, an area of great wealth, and this room high on a mountaintop commanded a natural view to the southwest across lesser peaks and foothills misted in purple by a westering G_3 sun.

But McKie ignored the view, trying to watch all corners of the room at once. He had seen a fifth gender Pan-Spechi here in company with the fourth-gender ego-holder. That could only mean the creche with its three dormants was nearby. By all accounts, this was a dangerous place for someone not protected by bonds of friendship and community of interest.

The value of the Pan-Spechi to the universal human society in which they participated was beyond question. What other species had such refined finesse in deciding when to hinder and when to help? Who else could send a key member of its group into circumstances of extreme peril without fear that the endangered one's knowledge would be lost?

There was always a dormant to take up where the lost one had left off.

Still, the Pan-Spechi did have their idiosyncrasies. And their hungers were at times bizarre.

"Ahh, McKie."

The voice, deep and masculine, came from his left McKie whirled to study the figure that came through a door carved from a single artificial emerald of glittering creme de menthe colors.

The speaker was humanoid but with Pan-Spechi multi-faceted eyes. He appeared to be a terranic man (except for the blue-green eyes) of an indeterminate, well-preserved middle age. The body suggested a certain daintiness in its yellow tights and singlet. The head was squared in outline with close-cropped blond hair, a fleshy chunk of nose and thick splash of mouth.

"Panthor Bolin here," the Pan-Spechi said. "You are welcome in my home, Jorj McKie."

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McKie relaxed slightly. Pan-Spechi were noted for honoring hospitality once it was extended . . . provided the guest didn't violate their mores.

"I'm honored that you've agreed to see me," McKie said.

"The honor is mine," Bolin said. "We've long recognized you as a person whose understanding of the Pan-Spechi is most subtle and penetrating. I've longed for the chance to have uninhibited conversation with you. And here you are." He indicated a chairdog against the wall to his right, snapped his fingers. The semi-sentient artifact glided to a position behind McKie. "Please be seated."

McKie, his caution re-alerted by Bolin's reference to "uninhibited conversation," sank into the chairdog, patting it until it assumed the contours he wanted.

Bolin took a chairdog facing him, leaving only about a meter separating their knees.

"Have our egos shared nearness before?" McKie asked. "You appeared to recognize me."

"Recognition goes deeper than ego," Bolin said. "Do you wish to join identities and explore this question?"

McKie wet his lips with his tongue. This was delicate ground with the Pan-Spechi, whose one ego moved somehow from member to member of the unit group as they traversed their *circle of being*.

"I . . . ah . . . not at this time," McKie said.

"Well spoken," Bolin said. "Should you ever change your mind, my ego-group would consider it a most signal honor. Yours is a strong identity, one we respect."

"I'm . . . most honored," McKie said. He rubbed nervously at his jaw, recognizing the dangers in this conversation. Each Pan-Spechi group maintained a supremely jealous attitude of and about its wandering ego. The ego imbued the holder of it with a touchy sense of honor. Inquiries about it could be carried out only through such formula questions as McKie already had asked.

Still, if this were a member of the pent-archal life circle containing the missing saboteur extraordinary Napoleon Bildoon . . . if it were, much would be explained.

"You're wondering if we really can communicate," Bolin said. McKie nodded.

"The concept of *humanity*," Bolin said, " — our term for it would translate approximately as *com-sentiency* — has been extended to encompass many differing shapes, life systems and

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methods of mentation. And yet we have never been sure about this question. It's one of the major reasons many of us have adopted your life-shape and much of your metabolism. We wished to experience your strengths and your weaknesses. This helps . . . but is not an absolute solution."

"Weaknesses?" McKie asked, suddenly wary.

"Ahhh-hummm," Bolin said. "I see. To allay your suspicions I will have translated for you soon one of our major works. Its title would be, approximately, *The Developmental Influence of Weaknesses*. One of the strongest sympathetic bonds we have with your species, for example, is the fact that we both originated as extremely vulnerable surface-bound creatures, whose most sophisticated defense came to be the social structure."

"I'll be most interested to see the translation," McKie said.

"Do you wish more amenities or do you care to state your business now?" Bolin asked.

"I was . . . ah . . . assigned to seek out a missing agent of our Bureau," McKie said, "to be certain no harm had befallen this . . . ah . . . agent."

"Your avoidance of gender is most refined," Bolin said. "I appreciate the delicacy of your position and your good taste. I will say this for now: the Pan-Spechi you seek is not at this time in need of your assistance. Your concern, however, is appreciated. It will be communicated to those upon whom it will have the most influence."

"That's a great relief to me," McKie said. And he wondered: *What did he really mean by that?* This thought elicited another, and McKie said: "Whenever I run into this problem of communication between species I'm reminded of an old culture/teaching story."

"Oh?" Bolin registered polite curiosity.

"Two practitioners of the art of mental healing, so the story goes, passed each other every morning on their way to their respective offices. They knew each other, but weren't on intimate terms. One morning as they approached each other, one of them turned to the other and said, 'Good morning.' The one greeted failed to respond, but continued toward his office. Presently, though, he stopped, turned and stared at the retreating back of the man who'd spoken, musing to himself: 'Now, what did he really mean by that?' "

Bolin began to chuckle, then laugh. His laughter grew louder and louder until he was holding his sides.

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It wasn't that funny, McKie thought.

Bolin's laughter subsided. "A very educational story," he said. "I'm deeply indebted to you. This story shows your awareness of how important it is in communication that we be aware of the other's identity."

Does it? McKie wondered. *How's that?*

And McKie found himself caught up by his knowledge of how the Pan-Spechi could pass a single ego-identity from individual to individual within the life circle group of five distinct protoplasmic units. He wondered how it felt when the ego-holder gave up the identity to become the fifth gender, passing the ego spark to a newly matured unit from the creche. Did the fifth gender willingly become creche nurse and give itself up as a mysterious identity-food for the three dormants in the creche? he wondered.

"I heard about what you did to Secretary of Sabotage Clinton Watt," Bolin said. "The story of your dismissal from the service preceded you here."

"Yes," McKie said. "That's why I'm here, too."

"You've penetrated to the fact that our Pan-Spechi community here on Achus is the heart of the Tax Watchers' orangization," Bolin said. "It was very brave of you to walk right into our hands. I understand how much more courage it takes for your kind to face unit extinction than it does for our kind. Admirable! You are indeed a prize."

McKie fought down a sensation of panic, reminding himself that the records he had left in his private locker of Bureau headquarters could be deciphered in time even if he did not return.

"Yes," Bolin said, "you wish to satisfy yourself that the ascension of a Pan-Spechi to the head of your Bureau will pose no threat to other human species. This is understandable."

McKie shook his head to clear it. "Do you read minds?" he demanded.

"Telepathy is not one of our accomplishments," Bolin said, his voice heavy with menace. "I do hope that was a generalized question and in no way directed at the intimacies of my ego-group."

"I felt that you were reading my mind," McKie said, tensing himself for defense.

"That was how I interpreted the question," Bolin said. "Forgive my question. I should not have doubted your delicacy or your tact."

"You do hope to place a member in the job of Bureau Secretary, though?" McKie said.

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"Remarkable that you should've suspected it," Bolin said. "How can you be sure our intention is not merely to destroy the Bureau?"

"I'm not." McKie glanced around the room, regretting that he had been forced to act alone.

"Where did we give ourselves away?' Bolin mused.

"Let me remind you," McKie said, "that I have accepted the hospitality you offered and that I've not offended your mores."

"Most remarkable," Bolin said. "In spite of all the temptations I offered, you have not offended our mores. This is true. You are an embarrassment, indeed you are. But perhaps you have a weapon. Yes?"

McKie lifted a wavering *shape* from an inner pocket.

"Ahhh, the Jicuzzi stim," Bolin said. "Now, let me see, is that a weapon?"

McKie held the *shape* on his palm. It appeared flat at first, like a palm-sized sheet of pink paper. Gradually, the flatness grew a superimposed image of a tube laid on its surface, then another image of an S-curved spring that coiled and wound around the tube.

"Our species can control its shape to some extent," Bolin said. "There's some question on whether I can consider this a weapon."

McKie curled his fingers around the *shape*, squeezed. There came a pop, and fumeroles of purple light emerged between his fingers accompanied by an odor of burnt sugar.

"Exit stim," McKie said. "Now I'm completely defenseless, entirely dependent upon your hospitality."

"Ah, you are a tricky one," Bolin said. "But have you no regard for Ser Clinton Watt? To him, the change you forced upon him is an affliction. You've destroyed the instrument that might have reversed the process."

"He can apply to the Jicuzzi," McKie said, wondering why Bolin should concern himself over Watt.

"Ah, but they will ask your permission to intervene," Bolin said. "They are so formal. Drafting their request should take at least three standard years. They will not take the slightest chance of offending you. And you, of course, cannot volunteer your permission without offending them. You know, they may even build a nerve-image of you upon which to test their petition. You are not a callous person, McKie, in spite of you clownish poses. I'd not realized how important this confrontation was to you."

"Since I'm completely at your mercy," McKie said,

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"would you try to stop me from leaving here?"

"An interesting question," Bolin said. "You have information I don't want revealed at this time. You're aware of this, naturally?"

"Naturally."

"I find the constitution a most wonderful document," Bolin said. "The profound awareness of the individual's identity and its relationship to society as a whole. Of particular interest is the portion dealing with the Bureau of Sabotage, those amendments recognizing that the Bureau itself might at times need . . . ah . . . adjustment."

Now what's he driving at? McKie wondered. And he noted how Bolin squinted his eyes in thought, leaving only a thin line of faceted glitter.

"I shall speak now as chief officer of the Tax Watchers," Bolin said, "reminding you that we are legally immune from sabotage."

I've found out what I wanted to know, McKie thought. Now if I can only get out of here with *it!*

"Let us consider the training of saboteurs extraordinary," Bolin said. "What do the trainees learn about the make-work and featherbedding elements in Bureau activity?"

He's not going to trap me in a lie, McKie thought. "We come right out and tell our trainees that one of our chief functions is to create jobs for the politicians to fill," he said. "The more hands in the pie, the slower the mixing."

"You've heard that telling a falsehood to your host is a great breach of Pan-Spechi mores, I see," Bolin said. "You understand, of course, that refusal to answer certain questions is interpreted as a falsehood?"

"So I've been told," McKie said.

"Wonderful! And what are your trainees told about the foot dragging and the monkeywrenches you throw into the path of legislation?"

"I quote from the pertinent training brochure," McKie said. "'A major function of the Bureau is to slow passage of legislation.'"

"Magnificent! And what about the disputes and outright battles Bureau agents have been known to incite?"

"Strictly routine," McKie said. "We're duty bound to encourage the growth of anger in government wherever we can. It exposes the temperamental types, the ones who can't control themselves, who can't think on their feet."

"Ah," Bolin said. "How entertaining."

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"We keep entertainment value in mind," McKie admitted. "We use drama and flamboyance wherever possible to keep our activities fascinating to the public."

"Flamboyant obstructionism," Bolin mused.

"Obstruction is a factor in strength," McKie said. "Only the strongest surmount the obstructions to succeed in government. The strongest . . . or the most devious, which is more or less the same thing when it comes to government."

"How illuminating," Bolin said. He rubbed the backs of his hands, a Pan-Spechi mannerism denoting satisfaction. "Do you have special instructions regarding political parties?"

"We stir up dissent between them," McKie said. "Opposition tends to expose reality, that's one of our axioms."

"Would you characterize Bureau agents as troublemakers?"

"Of course! My parents were happy as the devil when I showed troublemaking tendencies at an early age. They knew there'd be a lucrative outlet for this when I grew up. They saw to it that I was channeled in the right directions all through school — special classes in Applied Destruction, Advanced Irritation, Anger I and II . . . only the best teachers."

"You're suggesting the Bureau's an outlet for society's regular crop of troublemakers?"

"Isn't that obvious? And troublemakers naturally call for the services of troubleshooters. That's an outlet for do-gooders. You've a check and balance system serving society."

McKie waited, watching the Pan-Spechi, wondering if his answers had gone far enough.

"I speak as a Tax Watcher, you understand?" Bolin asked.

"I understand."

"The public pays for this Bureau. In essence, the public is paying people to cause trouble."

"Isn't that what we do when we hire police, tax investigators and the like?" McKie asked.

A look of gloating satisfaction came over Bolin's face. "But these agencies operate for the greater good of humanity!" he said.

"Before he begins training," McKie said, and his voice took on a solemn, lecturing tone, "the potential saboteur is shown the entire sordid record of history. The do-gooders succeeded once . . . long ago. They eliminated virtually all red tape from government. This great machine with its power over human lives slipped into high speed. It moved faster and faster." McKie's voice grew louder. "Laws were conceived and passed in the same

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hour! Appropriations came and were gone in a fortnight. New bureaus flashed into existence for the most insubstantial reasons."

McKie took a deep breath, realizing he'd put sincere emotional weight behind his words.

"Fascinating," Bolin said. "Efficient government, eh?"

"Efficient?" McKie's voice was filled with outrage. "It was like a great wheel thrown suddenly out of balance! The whole structure of government was in imminent danger of fragmenting before a handful of people, wise with hindsight, used measures of desperation and started what was called the Sabotage Corps."

"Ahhh, yes, I've heard about the Corps' violence."

He's needling me, McKie thought, but found that honest anger helped now. "All right, there was bloodshed and terrible destruction at the beginning," he said. "But the big wheels were slowed. Government developed a controllable speed."

"Sabotage," Bolin sneered. "In lieu of red tape."

I needed that reminder, McKie thought.

"No task too small for Sabotage, no task too large," McKie said. "We keep the wheel turning slowly and smoothly. Some anonymous Corpsman put it into words a long time ago: 'When in doubt, delay the big ones and speed the little ones.' "

"Would you say the Tax Watchers were a 'big one' or a 'little one'?" Bolin asked, his voice mild.

"Big one," McKie said and waited for Bolin to pounce.

But the Pan-Spechi appeared amused. "An unhappy answer."

"As it says in the Constitution," McKie said. " 'The pursuit of unhappiness is an inalienable right of all humans.' "

"Trouble is as trouble does," Bolin said and clapped his hands.

Two Pan-Spechi in the uniforms of system police came through the creme de menthe emerald door.

"You heard?" Bolin asked.

"We heard," one of the police said.

"Was he defending his bureau?" Bolin asked.

"He was," the policeman said.

"You've seen the court order," Bolin said. "It pains me because Ser McKie accepted the hospitality of my house, but he must be held incommunicado until he's needed in court. He's to be treated kindly, you understand?"

Is he really bent on destroying the Bureau? McKie asked himself in sudden consternation. *Do I have it figured wrong?*

"You contend my words were sabotage?" McKie asked.

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"Clearly an attempt to sway the chief officer of the Tax Watchers from his avowed duties," Bolin said. He stood, bowed.

McKie lifted himself out of the chairdog, assumed an air of confidence he did not feel. He clasped his thick-fingered hands together and bowed low, a grandfather toad rising from the deep to give his benediction. "In the words of the ancient proverb," he said, " 'The righteous man lives deep within a cavern and the sky appears to him as nothing but a small round hole.' "

Wrapping himself in dignity, McKie allowed the police to escort him from the room.

Behind him, Bolin gave voice to puzzlement: "Now, what did he mean by that?"

III

"Hear ye! Hear ye! System High Court, First Bench, Central Sector, is now in session!"

The robo-clerk darted back and forth across the cleared lift dais of the courtarena, its metal curves glittering in the morning light that poured down through the domed weather cover. Its voice, designed to fit precisely into the great circular room, penetrated to the farthest walls: "All persons having petitions before this court draw near!"

The silvery half globe carrying First Magistrate Edwin Dooley glided through an aperture behind the lift dais and was raised to an appropriate height. His white sword of justice lay diagonally across the bench in front of him. Dooley himself sat in dignified silence while the robo-clerk finished its stentorian announcement and rolled to a stop just beyond the lift field.

Judge Dooley was a tall, black browed man who affected the ancient look with ebon robes over white linen. He was noted for decisions of classic penetration.

He sat now with his face held in rigid immobility to conceal his anger and disquiet. Why had they put him in this hot spot? Because he'd granted the Tax Watchers' injunction? No matter how he ruled now, the result likely would be uproar. Even President Hindley was watching this one through one of the hotline projectors.

The President had called shortly before this session. It had been Phil and Ed all through the conversation, but the intent remained clear. The Administration was concerned about this case. Vital legislation pended; votes were needed. Neither the budget nor the Bureau of Sabotage had entered their conversation, but the President had made

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his point—*don't compromise the Bureau but save that Tax Watcher support for the Administration!*

"Clerk, the roster," Judge Dooley said.

And he thought: *They'll get judgment according to strict interpretation of the law! Let them argue with that!*

The robo-clerk's reelslate buzzed. Words appeared on the repeater in front of the judge as the clerk's voice announced: "The People versus Clifton Watt, Jorj X. McKie and the Bureau of Sabotage."

Dooley looked down into the courtarena, noting the group seated at the black oblong table in the Defense ring on his left: a sour-faced Watt with his rainbow horror of Medusa head, McKie's fat features composed in the look of someone trying not to snicker at a sly joke—the two defendants flanking their attorney, Pander Oulson, the Bureau of Sabotage's chief counsel. Oulson was a great thug of a figure in defense white with glistening eyes under beetle brows and a face fashioned mostly of scars.

At the Prosecution table on the right sat Prosecutor Holjance Vohnbrook, a tall scarecrow of a man dressed in conviction red. Gray hair topped a stern face as grim and forbidding as a latter day Cotton Mather. Beside him sat a frightened appearing young aide and Panthor Bolin, the Pan-Spechi complaintant, his multi-faceted eyes hidden beneath veined lids.

"Are we joined for trial?" Dooley asked.

Both Oulson and Vohnbrook arose, nodded.

"If the court pleases," Vohnbrook rumbled, "I would like to remind the Bureau of Sabotage personnel present that this court is exempt from their ministrations."

"If the prosecutor trips over his own feet," Oulson said, "I assure him it will be his own clumsiness and no act of mine nor of my colleagues."

Vohnbrook's face darkened with a rush of blood. "It's well known how you . . ."

A great drumming boomed through the courtarena as Dooley touched the handle of his sword of office. The sound drowned the prosecutor's words. When silence was restored, Dooley said: "This court will tolerate no displays of personality. I wish that understood at the outset."

Oulson smiled, a look like a grimace in his scarred face. "I apologize, Your Honor," he said.

Dooley sank back into his chair, noting the gleam in Oulson's eyes. It occurred to Dooley then that the defense attorney,

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sabotage-trained, could have brought on the prosecutor's attack to gain the court's sympathy.

"The charge is outlaw sabotage in violation of this court's injunction," Dooley said. "I understand that opening statements have been waived by both sides, the public having been admitted to causae in this matter by appropriate postings?"

"So recorded," intoned the robo-clerk.

Oulson leaned forward against the defense table, said: "Your Honor, defendant Jorj X. McKie has not accepted me as counsel and wishes to argue for separate trial. I am here now representing only the Bureau and Clinton Watt."

"Who is appearing for defendant McKie?" the judge asked.

McKie, feeling like a man leaping over a precipice, got to his feet, said: "I wish to represent myself, Your Honor."

"You should be cautioned against this course," Dooley said.

"Ser Oulson has advised me I have a fool for a client," McKie said. "But in common with most Bureau agents, I have legal training. I've been admitted to the System Bar and have practiced under such codes as the Gowachin where the double-negative innocence requirement must be satisfied before bringing criminal accusation against the prosecutor and proceeding backward the premise that . . ."

"This is not Gowachin," Judge Dooley said.

"May I remind the Court," Vohnbrook said, "that defendant McKie is a saboteur extraordinary. This goes beyond questions of champerty. Every utterance this man . . ."

"The law's the same for official saboteurs as it is for others in respect to the issue at hand," Oulson said.

"Gentlemen!" the judge said. "If you please? I will decide law in this court." He waited through a long moment of silence. "The behavior of all parties in this matter is receiving my most careful attention."

McKie forced himself to radiate calm good humor.

Watt, whose profound knowledge of the saboteur extraordinary made this pose a danger signal, tugged violently at the sleeve of defense attorney Oulson. Oulson waved him away. Watt glowered at McKie.

"If the court permits," McKie said, "a joint defense on the present charge would appear to violate . . ."

"The court is well aware that this case was bound over on the basis of deposa summation through a ruling by a robo-

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legum," Dooley said. "I warn both defense and prosecution, however, that I make my own decisions in such matters. Law and robo-legum are both human constructions and require human interpretation. And I will add that, as far as I'm concerned, in all conflicts between human agencies and machine agencies the human agencies are paramount."

"Is this a hearing or a trial?" McKie asked.

"We will proceed as in trial, subject to the evidence as presented."

McKie rested his palms on the edge of the defense table, studying the judge. The saboteur felt a surge of misgiving. Dooley was a no-nonsense customer. He had left himself a wide avenue within the indictment. And this was a case that went far beyond immediate danger to the Bureau of Sabotage. Far-reaching precedents could be set here this day—or disaster could strike. Ignoring instincts of self preservation, McKie wondered if he dared try sabotage within the confines of the court.

"The robo-legum indictment requires joint defense," McKie said. "I admit sabotage against Ser Clinton Watt, but remind the court of Paragraph Four, section ninety-one, of the Semantic Revision to the Constitution, wherein the Secretary of Sabotage is exempted from all immunities. I move to quash the indictment as it regards myself. I was at the time a legal officer of the Bureau required by my duties to test the abilities of my superior."

Vohnbrook scowled at McKie.

"Mmmm," Dooley said. He saw that the prosecutor had detected where McKie's logic must lead. If McKie were legally dismissed from the Bureau at the time of his conversation with the Pan-Spechi, the prosecution's case might fall through.

"Does the prosecutor wish to seek a conspiracy indictment?" Dooley asked.

For the first time since entering the courtarena, defense attorney Oulson appeared agitated. He bent his scarred features close to Watt's gorgon head, conferred in whispers with the defendant. Oulson's face grew darker and darker as he whispered. Watt's gorgon tendrils writhed in agitation.

"We don't seek a conspiracy indictment at this time," Vohnbrook said. "However, we would be willing to separate . . ."

"Your Honor!" Oulson said, surging to his feet. "Defense must protest separation of indictments at this time. It's our contention that . . ."

"Court cautions both counsel

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in this matter that this is not a Gowachin jurisdiction," Dooley said in an angry voice. "We don't have to convict the defender and exonerate the prosecutor before trying a case! However, if either of you would wish a change of venue . . ."

Vohnbrook, a smug expression on his lean face, bowed to the judge. "Your Honor," he said, "we wish at this time to request removal of defendant McKie from the indictment and ask that, he be held as a prosecution witness."

"Objection!" Oulson shouted. "Prosecution well knows it cannot hold a key witness under trumped up . . ."

"Overruled," Dooley said.

"Exception!"

"Noted."

Dooley waited as Oulson sank into his chair. *This is a day to remember,* the judge thought. *Sabotage itself outfoxed!* Then he noted the glint of sly humor in the eyes of saboteur extraordinary McKie, realizing with an abrupt sense of caution that McKie, too, had maneuvered for this position.

"Prosecution may call its first witness," the judge said, and he punched a code signal that sent a robo-aide to escort McKie away from the defense table and into a holding box.

A look of almost-pleasure came over prosecutor Vohnbrook's cadaverous face. He rubbed one of his downdrooping eyelids, said: "Call Panthor Bolin."

The Achusian capitalist got to his feet, strode to the witness ring. The robo-clerk's screen flashed for the record: "Panthor Bolin of Achus IV, certified witness in case A0115BD$_4$gGY74R'$_6$ of System High Court ZRZ^1."

"The oath of sincerity having been administered, Panthor Bolin is prepared for testifying," the robo-clerk recited.

"Panthor Bolin, are you chief officer of the civil organization known as the Tax Watchers?" Vohnbrook asked.

"I . . . ah . . . y-yes," Bolin faltered. He passed a large blue handkerchief across his forehead, staring sharply at McKie.

He just now realizes what it is I must do, McKie thought.

"I show you this recording from the robo-legum indictment proceedings," Vohnbrook said. "It is certified by System police as being a conversation between yourself and Jorj X. McKie in which . . ."

"Your Honor!" Oulson objected. "Both witnesses to this alleged conversation are present in this courtarena. There are more direct ways to bring out any pertinent information from

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this matter. Further, since the clear threat of a conspiracy charge remains in this case, I object to introducing this recording as forcing a man to testify against himself."

"Ser McKie is no longer on trial here and Ser Oulson is not McKie's attorney of record," Vohnbrook gloated.

"The objection does, however, have some merit," Dooley said. He looked at McKie seated in the holding box.

"There's nothing shameful about that conversation with Ser Bolin," McKie said. "I've no objection to introducing this record of the conversation."

Bolin rose up on his toes, made as though to speak, sank back.

Now he is certain, McKie thought.

"Then I will admit this record subject to judicial deletions," Dooley said.

Clinton Watt, seated at the defense table, buried his gorgon head in his arms.

Vohnbrook, a death's-head grin on his long face, said: "Ser Bolin, I show you this recording. Now, in this conversation, was Sabotage Agent McKie subjected to any form of coercion?"

"Objection!" Oulson roared, surging to his feet. His scarred face was a scowling mask. "At the time of this alleged recording, Ser McKie was not an agent of the Bureau!" He looked at Vohnbrook. "Defense objects to the prosecutor's obvious effort to link Ser McKie with . . ."

"*Alleged* conversation!" Vohnbrook snarled. "Ser McKie himself admits the exchange!"

In a weary voice, Dooley said: "Objection sustained. Unless tangible evidence of conspiracy is introduced here, references to Ser McKie as an agent of Sabotage will not be admitted here."

"But, Your Honor," Vohnbrook protested, "Ser McKie's own actions preclude any other interpretation!"

"I've ruled on this point," Dooley said "Proceed."

McKie got to his feet in the holding box, said: "Would Your Honor permit me to act as a friend of the Court here?"

Dooley leaned back, hand on chin, turning the question over in his mind. A general feeling of uneasiness about the case was increasing in him and he couldn't pinpoint it. McKie's every action appeared suspect. Dooley reminded himself that the saboteur extraordinary was notorious for sly plots, for devious and convoluted schemes of the wildest and most improbable inversions — like onion layers in a five dimensional klein-shape. The man's success in practicing under

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the Gowachin legal code could be understood.

"You may explain what you have in mind," Dooley said, "but I'm not yet ready to admit your statements into the record."

"The Bureau of Sabotage's own Code would clarify matters," McKie said, realizing that these words burned his bridges behind him. "My action in successfully sabotaging *acting* Secretary Watt is a matter of record."

McKie pointed to the gorgon mass visible as Watt lifted his head and glared across the room.

"*Acting* Secretary?" the judge asked.

"So it must be presumed," McKie said. "Under the Bureau's Code, once the Secretary is sabotaged he . . ."

"Your Honor!" Oulson shouted. "We are in danger of breach of security here! I understand these proceedings are being broadcast!"

"As Director-in-Limbo of the Bureau of Sabotage, I will decide what is a breach of security and what isn't!" McKie snapped.

Watt returned his head to his arms, groaned.

Oulson sputtered.

Dooley stared at McKie in shock.

Vohnbrook broke the spell. The prosecutor said: "Your Honor, this man has not been sworn to sincerity. I suggest we excuse Ser Bolin for the time being and have Ser McKie continue his *explanation* under oath."

Dooley took a deep breath, said: "Does defense have any questions of Ser Bolin at this time?"

"Not at this time," Oulson muttered. "I presume he's subject to recall?"

"He is," Dooley said, turning to McKie. "Take the witness ring, Ser McKie."

IV

Bolin, moving like a sleepwalker, stepped out of the ring, returned to the prosecution table. The Pan-Spechi's multifaceted eyes reflected an odd glitter, moving with a trapped sense of evasiveness.

McKie entered the ring, took the oath and faced Vohnbrook, composing his features in a look of purposeful decisiveness that he knew his actions must reflect.

"You called yourself Director-in-Limbo of the Bureau of Sabotage," Vohnbrook said. "Would you explain that, please?"

Before McKie could answer, Watt lifted his head from his arms, growled: "You traitor, McKie!"

Dooley grabbed the pommel of his sword of justice to indicate an absolute position and barked:

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"I will tolerate no outbursts in my court!"

Oulson put a hand on Watt's shoulder. Both of them glared at McKie. The medusa tendrils of Watt's head writhed as they ranged through the rainbow spectrum.

"I caution the witness," Dooley said, "that his remarks would appear to admit a conspiracy. Anything he says now may be used against him."

"No conspiracy, Your Honor," McKie said. He faced Vohnbrook, but appeared to be addressing Watt. "Over the centuries, the function of Sabotage in the government has grown more and more open, but certain aspects of changing the guard, so to speak, have been held as a highly placed secret. The rule is that if a man can protect himself from sabotage he's fit to boss Sabotage. Once sabotaged, however, the Bureau's Secretary must resign and submit his position to the President and the full Cabinet."

"He's out?" Dooley asked.

"Not necessarily," McKie said. "If the act of sabotage against the Secretary is profound enough, subtle enough, carries enough far reaching effects, the Secretary is replaced by the successful saboteur. He is, indeed, out."

"Then it's now up to the President and the Cabinet to decide between Ser Watt and yourself, is that what you're saying?" Dooley asked.

"Me?" McKie asked. "No, I'm Director-in-Limbo because I accomplished a successful *act* of sabotage against Ser Watt and because I happen to be senior saboteur extraordinary on duty."

"But it's alleged that you were fired," Vohnbrook objected.

"A formality," McKie said. "It's customary to fire the saboteur who's successful in such an effort. This makes him eligible for appointment as Secretary if he so aspires. However, I have no such ambition at this time."

Watt jerked upright, staring at McKie.

McKie ran a finger around his collar, realizing the physical peril he was about to face. A glance at the Pan-Spechi confirmed the feeling. Panthor Bolin was holding himself in check by a visible effort.

"This is all very interesting," Vohnbrook sneered, "but how can it possibly have any bearing on the present action? The charge here is outlaw sabotage against the Tax Watchers represented by the person of Ser Panthor Bolin. If Ser McKie . . ."

"If the distinguished Prosecutor will permit me," McKie said, "I believe I can set his fears at rest. It should be obvious to—"

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"There's conspiracy here!" Vohnbrook shouted. "What about the . . ."

A loud pounding interrupted him as Judge Dooley lifted his sword, its theremin effect filling the room. When silence had been restored, the judge lowered his sword, replaced it firmly on the ledge in front of him.

Dooley took a moment to calm himself. He sensed now the delicate political edge he walked and thanked his stars that he had left the door open to rule that the present session was a hearing.

"We will now proceed in an orderly fashion," Dooley said. "That's one of the things courts are for, you know." He took a deep breath. "Now, there are several people present whose dedication to the maintenance of law and order should be beyond question. I'd think that among those we should number Ser Prosecutor Vohnbrook; the distinguished defense counsel, Ser Oulson: Ser Bolin, whose race is noted for its reasonableness and humanity; and the distinguished representatives of the Bureau of Sabotage, whose actions may at times annoy and anger us, but who are, we know, consecrated to the principle of strengthening us and exposing our inner resources."

This judge missed his calling, McKie thought. *With speeches like that, he could get into the Legislative branch.*

Abashed, Vohnbrook sank back into his chair.

"Now," the judge said, "unless I'm mistaken, Ser McKie has referred to two acts of sabotage." Dooley glanced down at McKie. "Ser McKie?"

"So it would appear, Your Honor," McKie said, hoping he read the judge's present attitude correctly. "However, this court may be in a unique position to rule on that very question. You see, Your Honor, the alleged act of sabotage to which I refer was initiated by a Pan-Spechi agent of the Bureau. Now, though, the secondary benefits of that action appear to be sought after by a creche mate of that agent, whose . . ."

"You dare suggest that I'm not the holder of my cell's ego?" Bolin demanded.

Without knowing quite where it was or what it was, McKie was aware that a weapon had been trained on him by the Pan-Spechi. References in their culture to the weapon for defense of the ego were clear enough.

"I make no such suggestion," McKie said, speaking hastily and with as much sincerity as he could put into his voice. "But surely you cannot have misinterpreted the terranic-human cul-

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ture so much that you do not know what will happen now."

Warned by some instinct, the judge and other spectators to this interchange remained silent.

Bolin appeared to be trembling in every cell of his body. "I am distressed," he muttered.

"If there were a way to achieve the necessary rapport and avoid that distress I would have taken it," McKie said. "Can you see another way?"

Still trembling, Bolin said: "I must do what I must do."

In a low voice, Dooley said: "Ser McKie, just what is going on here?"

"Two cultures are, at last, attempting to understand each other," McKie said. "We've lived together in apparent understanding for centuries, but appearances can be deceptive."

Oulson started to rise, was pulled back by Watt.

And McKie noted that his former Bureau chief had assessed the peril here. It was a point in Watt's favor.

"You understand, Ser Bolin," McKie said, watching the Pan-Spechi carefully, "that these things must be brought into the open and discussed carefully before a decision can be reached in this court. It's a rule of law to which you've submitted. I'm

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inclined to favor your bid for the Secretariat, but my own decision awaits the outcome of this hearing."

"What things must be discussed?" Dooley demanded. "And what gives you the right, Ser McKie, to call this a hearing?"

"A figure of speech," McKie said, but he kept his attention on the Pan-Spechi, wondering what the terrible weapon was that the race used in defense of its egos. "What do you say, Ser Bolin?"

"You protect the sanctity of your home life," Bolin said. "Do you deny me the same right?"

"Sanctity, not secrecy," McKie said.

Dooley looked from McKie to Bolin, noted the compressed-spring look of the Pan-Spechi, the way he kept a hand hidden in a jacket pocket. It occurred to the judge then that the Pan-Spechi might have a weapon ready to use against others in this court. Bolin had that look about him. Dooley hesitated on the point of calling guards, reviewed what he knew of the Pan-Spechi. He decided not to cause a crisis. The Pan-Spechi were admitted to the concourse of humanity, good friends but terrible enemies, and there were always those allusions to their hidden powers, to their ego jealousies, to the fierceness with which they defended the secrecy of their creches.

Slowly, Bolin overcame the trembling. "Say what you feel you must," he growled.

McKie said a silent prayer of hope that the Pan-Spechi could control his reflexes, addressed himself to the nexus of pickups on the far wall that was recording this courtarena scene for broadcast to the entire universe.

"A Pan-Spechi who took the name of Napoleon Bildoon was one of the leading agents in the Bureau of Sabotage," McKie said. "Agent Bildoon dropped from sight at the time Panthor Bolin took over as chief of the Tax Watchers. It's highly probable that the Tax Watcher organization is an elaborate and subtle sabotage of the Bureau of Sabotage itself, a move originated by Bildoon."

"There is no such person as Bildoon!" Bolin cried.

"Ser McKie," Judge Dooley said, "would you care to continue this interchange in the privacy of my chambers?" The judge stared down at the saboteur, trying to appear kindly but firm.

"Your Honor," McKie said, "may we, out of respect for a fellow human, leave that decision to Ser Bolin?"

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Bolin turned his multi-faceted eyes toward the bench, spoke in a low voice: "If the court please, it were best this were done openly." He jerked his hand from his pocket. It came out empty. He leaned across the table, gripped the far edge. "Continue, if you please, Ser."

McKie swallowed, momentarily overcome with admiration for the Pan-Spechi. "It will be a distinct pleasure to serve under you, Ser Bolin," McKie said.

"Do what you must!" Bolin rasped.

McKie looked from the wonderment in the faces of Watt and the attorneys up to the questioning eyes of Judge Dooley. "In Pan-Spechi parlance, there is no person called Bildoon. But there was such a person, a group mate of Ser Bolin. I hope you notice the similarity in the names they chose for themselves?"

"Ah . . . yes," Dooley said.

"I'm afraid I've been somewhat of a nosey Parker, a peeping Tom and several other categories of snoop where the Pan-Spechi are concerned," McKie said. "But it was because I suspected the act of sabotage to which I've referred here. The Tax Watchers revealed too much inside knowledge of the Bureau of Sabotage."

"I . . . ah . . . am not quite sure I understand you," Dooley said

"The best kept secret in the universe, the Pan-Spechi cyclic change of gender and identity, is no longer a secret where I'm concerned," McKie said. He swallowed as he saw Bolin's fingers go white where they tightly gripped the prosecution table.

"It relates to the issue at hand?" Dooley asked.

"Most definitely, Your Honor," McKie said. "You see, the Pan-Spechi have a unique gland that controls mentation, dominance, the relationship between reason and instinct. The five group mates are, in reality, one person. I wish to make that clear for reasons of legal necessity."

"Legal necessity?" Dooley asked. He glanced down at the obviously distressed Bolin, back to McKie.

"The gland, when it's functioning, confers ego dominance on the Pan-Spechi in whom it functions. But it functions for a time that's definitely limited —twenty-five to thirty years." McKie looked at Bolin. Again, the Pan-Spechi was trembling. "Please understand, Ser Bolin," he said, "that I do this out of necessity and that this is not an act of sabotage."

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Bolin lifted his face toward McKie. The Pan-Spechi's features appeared contorted in grief. "Get it over with, man!" he rasped.

"Yes," McKie said, turning back to the judge's puzzled face. "Ego transfer in the Pan-Spechi, Your Honor, involves a transfer of what may be termed basic - experience - learning. It's accomplished through physical contractor when the ego holder dies, no matter how far he may be separated from the creche, this seems to fire up the eldest of the creche triplets. The ego-single also bequeaths a verbal legacy to his mate whenever possible—and that's most of the time. Specifically, it's this time."

Dooley leaned back. He was beginning to see the legal question McKie's account had posed.

"The act of sabotage which might make a Pan-Spechi eligible for appointment as Secretary of the Bureau of Sabotage was initiated by a . . . ah . . . cell mate of the Ser Bolin in court today, is that it?" Dooley asked.

McKie wiped his brow. "Correct, Your Honor."

"But that cell mate is no longer the ego dominant, eh?"

"Quite right, Your Honor."

"The . . . ah . . . former ego holder, this . . . ah . . . Bildoon, is no longer eligible?"

"Bildoon, or what was once Bildoon, is a creature operating solely on instinct now, Your Honor," McKie said. "Capable of acting as creche nurse for a time and, eventually, fulfilling another destiny I'd rather not explain."

"I see." Dooley looked at the weather cover of the court arena. He was beginning to see what McKie had risked here. "And you favor this, ah, Ser Bolin's bid for the Secretariat?" Dooley asked.

"If President Hindley and the Cabinet follow the recommendation of the Bureau's senior agents, the procedure always followed in the past, Ser Bolin will be the new Secretary," McKie said. "I favor this."

"Why?" Dooley asked.

"Because of this unique roving ego, the Pan-Spechi have a more communal attitude toward fellow sentients than do most other species admitted to the concourse of humanity," McKie said. "This translates as a sense of responsibility toward all life. They're not necessarily maudlin about it. They oppose where it's necessary to build strength. Their creche life demonstrates several clear examples of this which I'd prefer not to describe."

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"I see," Dooley said, but he had to admit to himself that he did not. McKie's allusions to unspeakable practices were beginning to annoy him. "And you feel that this Bildoon-Bolin act of sabotage qualifies him, provided this court rules they are one and the same person?"

"We're not the same person!" Bolin cried. "You don't dare say I'm that . . . that shambling, clinging . . ."

"Easy," McKie said. "Ser Bolin, I'm sure you see the need for this legal fiction."

"Legal fiction," Bolin said as though clinging to the words. The multi-faceted eyes glared across the courtarena at McKie. "Thank you for the verbal nicety, McKie."

"You've not answered my question, Ser McKie," Dooley said, ignoring the exchange with Bolin.

"Sabotaging Ser Watt through an attack on the entire Bureau contains sublety and finesse never before achieved in such an effort," McKie said. "The entire Bureau will be strengthened by it."

McKie glanced at Watt. The acting Secretary's medusa tangle had ceased its writhing. He was staring at Bolin with a speculative look in his eyes. Sensing the quiet in the courtarena, he glanced up at McKie.

"Don't you agree, Ser Watt?" McKie asked.

"Oh, yes. Quite," Watt said.

The note of sincerity in Watt's voice startled the judge. For the first time, he wondered at the dedication which these men brought to their jobs.

"Sabotage is a very sensitive Bureau," Dooley said. "I've some serious reservations—"

"If Your Honor please," McKie said, "forbearance is one of the chief attributes a saboteur can bring to his duties. Now, I wish you to understand what our Pan-Spechi friend has done here this day. Let us suppose that I had spied upon the most intimate moments between you, Judge, and your wife, and that I reported them in detail here in open court with half the universe looking on. Let us suppose further that you had the strictest moral code against such discussions with outsiders. Let us suppose that I made these disclosures in the basest terms with every four-letter word at my command. Let us suppose that you were armed, traditionally, with a deadly weapon to strike at such blasphemers, such—"

"Filth!" Bolin grated.

"Yes," McKie said. "Filth. Do you suppose, Your Honor, that you could have stood by without killing me?"

"God heavens!" Dooley said.

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"Ser Bolin," McKie said, "I offer you and all your race my most humble apologies."

"I'd hoped once to undergo the ordeal in the privacy of a judge's chambers with as few outsiders as possible," Bolin said. "But once you were started in open court . . ."

"It had to be this way," McKie said. "If we'd done it in private, people would've come to be suspicious about a Pan-Spechi in control of . . ."

"People?" Bolin asked.

"Non Pan-Spechi," McKie said. "It'd have been a barrier between our species.

"And we've been strengthened by all this," McKie said. "Those provisions of the Constitution that provide the people with a slowly moving government have been demonstrated anew. We've admitted the public to the inner workings of Sabotage, shown them the valuable character of the man who'll be the new Secretary."

"I've not yet ruled on the critical issue here," Dooley said.

"But Your Honor!" McKie said.

"With all due respect to you as a saboteur extraordinary, Ser McKie," Dooley said, "I'll make my decision on evidence gathered under my direction."

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He looked at Bolin. "Ser Bolin, would you permit an agent of this court to gather such evidence as will allow me to render verdict without fear of harming my own species?"

"We're humans together," Bolin growled.

"But terranic humans hold the balance of power," Dooley said. "I owe allegiance to law, yes, but my terranic fellows depend on me, too. I have a . . ."

"You wish your own agents to determine if Ser McKie has told the truth about us?"

"Ah . . . yes," Dooley said.

Bolin looked at McKie. "Ser McKie, it is I who apologize to you. I had not realized how deeply xenophobia penetrated your fellows."

"Because," McKie said, "outside of your natural modesty, you have no such fear. I suspect you know the phenomenon only through reading of us."

"But all strangers are potential sharers of identity," Bolin said. "Ah, well."

"If you're through with your little chat," Dooley said, "would you care to answer my question, Ser Bolin? This is still I hope, a court of law."

"Tell me, Your Honor," Bolin said, "would you permit me to witness the tenderest intimacies between you and your wife?"

Dooley's face darkened, but he saw suddenly in all of its stark detail the extent of McKie's analogy and it was to the judge's credit that he rose to the occasion. "If it were necessary to promote understanding," he rasped, "yes!"

"I believe you would," Bolin murmured. He took a deep breath. "After what I've been through here today, one more sacrifice can be borne, I guess. I grant your investigators the privilege requested, but advise that they be discreet."

"It will strengthen you for the trials ahead as Secretary of the Bureau," McKie said. "The Secretary, you must bear in mind, has no immunities from sabotage whatsoever."

"But," Bolin said, "the Secretary's legal orders carrying out his Constitutional functions must be obeyed by all agents."

McKie nodded, seeing in the glitter of Bolin's eyes, a vista of peeping Tom assignments with endless detailed reports to the Secretary of Sabotage—at least until the fellow's curiosity had been satisfied and his need for revenge satiated.

But the others in the courtroom, not having McKie's insight, merely wondered at the question: *What did he really mean by that?*

—FRANK HERBERT

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What's the Name of That Town?

BY R. A. LAFFERTY

Poor little computer! It couldn't remember what it most wanted to know . . . and neither could anyone else!

"Epiktistes tells me that you are onto something big, Mr. Smirnov," Valery said, turning to her companion.

"Epikt has the loudest mouth of any machine I was ever associated with," Gregory Smirnov growled. "I never saw one that could keep a secret. But this one goes to extremes. Actually, we don't have a thing. We're just fiddling around with an unborn idea."

"How about it, Epikt?" Valery asked.

"Big, real big," the machine issued.

"What are you doing now, Epikt?" Valery wanted to know.

"Talk to me, dammit! I'm the man, he's the machine," Smirnov cut in. "He's chewing encyclopedias and other references. It's all he ever does."

"I thought he went through them all long ago."

"Certainly, dozens of times. He has all the data that can be fed into a machine, and every day we shovel in bales of the

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new stuff. But he's chewing it now for a very different purpose."

"What different purpose, Mr. Smirnov?"

"It's difficult to say because I haven't as yet been able to state it to him. We're trying to set a problem where it seems there ought to be one — and then answer it. We may find the answer before the question. At first, he rejected my request, later he accepted it — ironically. I doubt that he's sincere now. He can be quite a clown, as you should well know."

"I know that you two are onto something good," Valery said. "The more you deny it, the more I'm sure of it. Tell me the truth, Epikt."

"Big, real big," Epiktistes issued to Valery.

"Valery," said Smirnov. "You're a woman and you might be inclined to say something about this to the other Institute people. Please don't. We don't have anything yet and it makes me nervous to have hot little people breathing down my neck."

"I won't say a word," Valery swore with grave insincerity. She winked at the machine, and Epikt winked back at her with three tiers of eyes. Valery Mok and Epiktistes had a thing going with each other.

Valery was nearly as bad as a machine at not being able to keep a secret. She had the whole Institute staff excited about what Smirnov and Epiktistes were working on. The staff consisted of Charles Cogsworth, her own over-shadowed husband, Glasser the stiff-necked inventor of the E.P. Locator and Aloysius Shiplap the seminal genius.

They were all after Smirnov and his machine the next day.

"We've been together on every project," Glasser said. "Valery tells us that the problem hasn't been properly formulated, and that Epikt has only accepted it ironically. We're pretty good at formulating problems, Gregory, and a little sterner than you, when it comes to dealing with clownish machines."

"All right, this is the way it is, Glasser," Smirnov said reluctantly. "My first statement was, we should seek to discover something not known to exist, by a close study of the absence of evidence. When I put the problem to Epiktistes in this generalized form he just laughed at me."

"That would have been my first impulse too, Smirnov," said Shiplap. "Don't you have a better idea of what you're looking for?"

"Shiplap, I had the feeling of trying to remember something

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that I'd been compelled to forget. My second statement wasn't much better. 'Let us see,' I said to Epikt, 'if we cannot reconstruct something of which even the idea has been completely eradicated, let's see if we can't find it by considering the excessive evidence that it was never there.' In this form, Epikt accepted it. Or else he decided to go along with me for the gag. I'm never quite sure how this clanking machine takes things."

"Well, no hole can be filled up perfectly," said Cogsworth. "There will either be too much or too little of whatever is being used as the filler, or it will be of a different texture. The difficulty is that you didn't give Epikt any clues. There will be a million things forgotten or repressed that will show an irregularity of fill. How will Epikt know which of them is the one that you are somehow trying to remember?"

"Item. The buried thing will have a buried tie with my boss man Smirnov," Epiktistes, the machine, issued.

"Yes, of course," said Glasser. "Has Epikt turned up anything?"

"Only a bushelful of things that seem to mean nothing," said Smirnov sadly.

"Item. Why in Hungarian dictionary-encyclopedias of a certain period, is there padding between the words Sik and Sikamlos?" Epiktistes asked.

"I follow your thought, Epikt," Glasser agreed. "That could be a clue to something. If the idea and the name of something were expunged from every reference, then, in all original editions, other subjects on the same page would have to be padded slightly or another subject set in. This filling might be hurried, and therefore of an inferior quality. So, who knows a word that is no longer used and that comes between Sik and Sikamlos? If we knew the word would we know what it meant? And would it help us if we did?"

"Item. Why is the young of a bear now referred to as a pup when once it may have been known as a cube?" Epikt issued.

"I've never heard the young of a bear referred to as a cube," Shiplap protested.

"Epikt has come on that by our omission-appraisal method," Smirnov explained. "There is probably an imperfect erasure working. I believe that cube is a distortion of a word that has somehow been forced out of folk memory. Epikt has this clue from a ballad which I believe is far removed from the main suppression or it would not have survived in even this distorted form."

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"Item. Why is the awkward word Coronal used for the simple doubling or return of a rope? Why is not a simpler word used?" Epikt asked.

"Has Epikt considered that seamen have always used odd terms and that landsmen often adopt them?" Cogsworth asked.

"Naturally — Epikt always considers everything," Smirnov answered. "He has thousands of these items now, and he believes that he will be able to put them into a pattern."

"Item. Why is there a great hiatus in period jazz. It's as though a great hunk of it had been yanked out by the roots, in the words of one Benny B-Flat."

"Smirnov, I know that your machine has unusual talents," said Glasser, "but if he can tie these things together he's a concatenated genius."

"Or a cantankerous clown," Smirnov said. "I know that he has to have some emotional release from the stress of his work, but he often overdoes it with humor and drollery."

"Item. Why is reference to the Amerindian peace-pipe avoided as though some obscenity were attached to it, and none is discoverable?"

"That's a new one while we're standing here," said Smirnov. "He's accumulating quite a few of them."

"Item. Why is — ?" Epikt started.

"Oh, shut up and get back to work," Smirnov ordered his machine. "Let's leave him with it until tomorrow, folks. It may begin to pull together by then," said Smirnov, stalking off.

"Going to be real big," Epiktistes issued to them after his boss man had left. "Boys and girls, it's going to be real big."

The next day they combined the meeting around the machine with a party for Shiplap. Aloysius Shiplap had grown — for the first time ever, anywhere — left-handed grass. It was not called that because it whorled to the left, but because the organic constitutents of it were reversed in their construction. Left-handed minerals had been constructed long since, and perhaps they also occurred in nature. Left-handed bacteria and broths were long known, but nobody else had ever grown anything as complex as left-handed grass.

"In everything, its effect is reversed," Shiplap explained. "Cattle pastured on this would lose rather than gain weight. If there ever develops a market for really skinny cattle I'll be waiting for it."

They tossed off a good bit of Tosher's Gin as they got into the celebration. Tosher's is the

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only drink that will buzz up both humans and Ktistec machines. There is a flavoring used in Tosher's that gets machines high. The alcohol in it sometimes has a similar effect on humans.

Epiktistes got as mellow as a Pottawattamie County pumpkin. Ktistec machines are like the Irish and the Indians. They start unwinding when the gin begins to flow. Their behavior could become quite wild unless carefully watched.

And the Institute people were also having a good time.

"I wouldn't have him any other way," said Smirnov. "When he relaxes, he relaxes all over the place. Hawkin's machine literally bites people when it's frustrated by a difficult problem. Drexel's smaller machine comes all apart throwing arc-snuffers and solenoids and is mighty dangerous to be around. There are worse sorts than the clown of a machine I have — though he does get pretty slushy when he's in his cups."

Valery Mok had gathered up a bunch of Epiktistes' utterances and slipped them into cocktail cookies. Glasser, eating one, chewed on a bit of the metallic tape. He pulled it, slithering, off his tongue, and read —

"Item. What was the mysterious name written by a deaf moron on the wall of the men's room in an institution in Vinita, Oklahoma?"

Epiktistes giggled, though the item may have been serious when he issued it.

Cogsworth pulled one out of his mouth, stripping the crumbs from it with his tongue as it came.

"Item. Why does Petit Larousse take five lines too many to say almost nothing about the ancient Chibcha Indians of Columbia?"

At this point Valery went into her high laugh that would even make the alphabet sound funny.

Shiplap pulled one out of his grinning mouth, and it seemed an extension of his grin as it came.

"Item," he read. "What is there about the Great Blue Island Swamp that puzzles Geologists? Or — in the old by-lining manner — how recent is recent?"

Tosher's is giggle juice. Glasser's laughter sounded like a string of fire-crackers going off.

Smirnov extracted the utterance from his cookie in the lordly manner. He read the utterance as though it were of extreme importance — and it was.

"Item. What peculiarity is almost revealed by the faded paint

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of old Rock Island and Pacific Railroad box-cars?"

"Oh, stop giggling, Epikt, it isn't as funny as that!"

"It is, it is!" bubbled Valery. Then she nearly choked bringing out from her own cookie a very long tape, and she read it with a very gay voice:

"Item. Why, when the gruesome Little Willy verses were revived among sub-teen-agers in the early nineteen-eighties, were they concerned almost entirely with chewing gum? In their Australian and British homelands six decades before they were concerned with everything. But here we have gruesome verses about forty-nine different flavors of gum. As for instance,

Little Willy mixed his gum
with bits of Baby's cerebrum
and Papa's blood for Juicy
Fruit.
Mother said, "Or, Will, don't
duit."

"I'd think it would give too high a flavor to the gum," said Glasser.

It's a lot of fun to open cocktail cookies and read out utterances of a Ktistec machine. The Institute staff generated a bunch of what we can only call merriment. But they were busy people, and the party had to come to an end. Epiktistes issued a verse as they prepared to leave.

When the world's last Tosher's
is drunken,
and the world's last item has
flewn,
and the Institute people are
stunken,
and Epikt is high as the —

And there he stuck! Eight million billion billion memory contacts he had in him, and he couldn't come up with a rime for flewn.

"How many items have you really gathered, Epikt?" Glasser asked as they began to break up.

"Millions of them, bub, millions of them."

"No. Actually he has about three-quarters of a million that he believes he can tie together," Smirnov explained. "I feel that he'll bring them into a pattern, but I'm afraid that it will be a facetious one."

"Epikt, you cute cubicle, will you be able to give us any idea of what to look for by tomorrow?" Valery asked.

"Boys and girls, I'll have it all wrapped up and on display for you tomorrow," Epiktistes issued. "I'll even be able to tell you what the thing smelled like."

Expectation ran high among the people of the Institute. Epiktistes wanted to have the reporters in, but Smirnov said no. He didn't trust his machine. Epikt was a cube twenty meters

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on a side; and of his thousands of eyes, some of them always seemed to be laughing at his master.

"It won't be a hoax?" Smirnov asked his machine apprehensively.

"Boss, did I ever hoax you?" Epikt issued.

"Yes."

"Boss, some things are best presented in the guise of a hoax, but underneath this won't be one."

It was a crooked-tongued machine sometimes, and Smirnov was more apprehensive than ever.

The next day everyone gathered early to hear what Epikt had to say. They pulled up chairs and recording canisters and waited for the machine to begin.

"Ladies, gentlemen, associates," said Epikt solemnly, "we are gathered together to hear of an important matter. I will present it as well as I am able. There will be disbelief, I know, but I am sure of my facts. Make yourselves comfortable." He paused and then as an afterthought added — "You may smoke."

"You clanking cubicle, don't tell us what we may do," Smirnov screamed. "You're only a machine that I made."

"You and three thousand other workers," issued Epikt, without blinking an eye, "and in the final stages, the important stages, I directed my own assembly. I could not have happened otherwise. Only I know what is in me. As to my own abilities —"

"Get on with it, Epikt," Smirnov ordered, "and try to avoid the didactic manner."

"Then to get to the point — in the year 1980, the largest City of the American Midland was destroyed by an unnatural disaster."

"That was only twenty years ago," Glasser cut in. "It seems that someone would have heard of it."

"I wonder if St. Louis knew that she was destroyed," Valery ventured. "She acts as though she thought that she were still there."

"St. Louis was not the City," issued Epikt. "This destruction of a metropolitan area of seven million persons in much less than seven seconds was a great horror from the human viewpoint — come to think of it I now recall being a little disturbed by it myself. The thing was so fearful that it was decided to suppress the whole business and blissfully forget about it."

"Wouldn't that be a little difficult?" said Aloysius Shiplap sarcastically.

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"It was very difficult to do," issued Epikt, "and yet it was done, completely, within twenty hours. And from that moment until this, nobody has remembered or thought about it at all."

"And if Your Whimsical Highness will just explain how this was done?" Smirnov challenged his machine.

"I'll explain as well as I can, good master. The project was put in charge of a master scientist who shall be nameless — but only for a few minutes."

"How were the written references of a metropolis of seven million persons obliterated?" asked Cogsworth.

"By a device then newly invented by our master scientist," Epikt answered. "It was known as the Tele-Pantographic Distorter. Even I from this distance of time and through the cloud of induced amnesia, cannot understand how it worked. But it *did* work, and it simultaneously destroyed all printed references to our subject. This left holes in the references, and the flow of matter to fill those holes was sometimes of inferior texture, as I have noted. Holographic — that is handwritten, for you, Valery — references were more difficult. Most were simply destroyed. In more importent documents, the text was flowed in automatic writing to fill the hole, and in close imitation of the original handwriting. But these imitations were often imperfect. I have a few thousand instances of this. But the Tele-Pantographic Distorter was a truly remarkable machine, and I regret that it is now out of use."

"Kindly explain what happened to this remarkable machine," said Smirnov.

"Oh, it's still here in the Institute. You stumble into it a dozen times a day, good master, and you curse it as 'That Damnable Pile of Junk.'" issued Epikt. "But you have a block, that will not allow you to remember what it is."

"I believe that I have been stumbling into such a pile of junk for many years," mused Smirnov. "Several times I have almost permitted myself to wonder what it was."

"And you invented it. The master scientist of the memory-obliteration was yourself, Gregory Smirnov."

"Hog hang it, Epikt! Your jug will leak!" protested Shiplap. "How of the human memories? The seven million inhabitants of the city would have had relatives of at least an equal number elsewhere. Didn't they wonder about their mothers or children or brothers and sisters?"

"They sorrowed, but they

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didn't wonder," issued Epikt. "It was a sorrow to which they could give no name. Examine the period and see how many really sad songs were popular in the years 1980 and 1981. But broadcast euphoria soon masked it over. The human memory of the thing was blocked by induced world amnesia. This was done hypnotically over the broadcast waves, and over more subtle waves. Few escaped it. The deaf moron mentioned in one of my items was one of those few. He scrawled the name of the town on a wall once, but it meant nothing to anyone."

"But there would be a hundred million loose ends to clean up," Glasser protested.

"Raise that number several powers," issued Epikt. "There were very many loose ends, and most of them were taken care of. I gathered a million or so that remained in the process of this study, but they could not break through the induced amnesia. The door was bolted on the whole subject. Then it was double-locked. It was necessary to destroy not only the memory, but also the memory of that memory. Mr. Smirnov, in what was perhaps his greatest feat, put himself under the final hypnosis against it. It was his job to pull in the hole after them all. But it bothered him more than others because he was more involved in it. After this temporary explanation it will bother him no more. This time he will forget it with a clear conscience.

"He does not recognize or remember it even now. It was his intent and triumph that he never should. The city and its destruction are forgotten forever, but the *method* of that memory-obliteration has only been forced to a subliminal level. It will be resurrected and used again whenever there is a great unnatural disaster."

"And where in tarnation or the American Midlands was this city?" Cogsworth hollered.

"Its site is now known as the Great Blue Island Swamp," issued Epikt.

"Finish it, you goggle-eyed gadget!" Shiplap shrilled. "What's the name of that town?"

"Chicago," issued Epiktistes.

That broke it! That tore it clear up! It was a hoax after all. That clattering clown of a cubicle had led them into it with all eyes open. Valery went into her high laughter, and her good husband Cogsworth chortled like that gooney bird with the hiccups.

"Chicago! It sounds like a little zoo beaver sliding down a mud slide and hitting the water.

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Chicago!" It was the funniest word Valery had ever heard.

"Nobody but a machine gone comic could coin a name like that," laughed Glasser with his fire-cracker laugh. "Chicago!"

"I take my hat off to you, Epiktistes," said Aloysius Shiplap, "You are a cog-footed, tongue - in - cheek tall tale teller. People, this machine is ripe!"

"I'm a little disappointed," said Smirnov. "So the mountain labored and produced a mouse. But did it have to be a wall-eyed mouse in a clown suit, Epikt? It's too tall even for a tale. That a great city could be completely destroyed only twenty years ago and we know nothing about it — that's tall enough. But that it should have the impossible name of Chicago tops it all. If you weighed all possible sounds — and I'm sure that you did, Epikt — you could not come up with a more ridiculous sounding name than that."

"Good people, it is meant to be this way," issued Epiktistes. "You cannot remember it. You cannot recognize it. And when you leave this room you will not even be able to recall the funny name. You will have only the dim impression that the clownish machine played a clownish trick on you. The disasters — for I suspect that there were several such — are well forgotten. The world would lie down and die if it remembered them too well.

"And yet there really was a large city named Chicago. As Sikago it left a hole in one Hungarian dictionary - encyclopedia; and the Petit Larousse had to flow French froth about the Chibcha Indians into the place where Chicago had stood. Something, for which I find the tentative name of Chicago Hot was pulled out of the jazz complex by the roots. The Calumet River had flowed about the City somewhere, so there came a reluctance to use that name of the old Indian peace-pipe. Chicago was a great city. The heart of her downtown was known as the Loop, and one of her baseball teams was named the Cubs. For that reason those two words were forced out of use. They might be evocative."

"Loop? Cubs?" giggled Valery. "Those words are almost as funny as Chicago. How do you make them up, Epikt?"

"In popular capsule impression Chicago was the chewing-gum capital of the world. The leader in this manufacture was a man named — as well as I can reconstruct it Wiggly. Children somehow found the echos of the gruesome destruction of

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Chicago and tied it in with this capsule impression to produce the bloody Little Willy verses about chewing gum."

"Epikt, you top yourself," said Shiplap, "if anything could top an invention as funny as Chicago."

"Good people, it comes down over you like a curtain," issued Epiktistes. "You forget again — even my joke, even the funny name of the town. And, more to the point, I forget also.

"It's gone. Gone. All gone. How peculiar! It is a long blank tape you all stare at as though you were under hypnosis. I must have suffered a black-out. I never issued a blank tape before. Smirnov, I have the taste in my terminals of an experiment that didn't quite come off. Feed me another. I don't fail often."

"That is enough for today, Epiktistes. We are all sleepy for some reason. No it didn't work out — whatever it was. I forget what it was that we were working on. It doesn't matter. Our failures are well forgot. We'll hit on something else. We're working on a lot of things."

Then they all shuffled out sleepily and went back to their work. Smirnov's machine had busted on something or other, but it was a good machine and would hit the next time, of that they were sure.

In a corridor, Smirnov stumbled into his old Tele-Pantographic Distorter. He had been stumbling unseeing into it every day for twenty years.

The machine rolled nine banks of eyes at Smirnov and smiled willingly. Was it another of those disasters? Was there any deep work to be done? Tele-Pan was ready. But no. Smirnov passed on. The machine smiled again and went peacefully back to sleep.

"That damnable piece of junk," Smirnov growled, walking along and petting his sore shin. "I feel almost as if I were on the verge of wondering what it is." — R. A. LAFFERTY

If You Can Make It to the West Coast—

On Labor Day or thereabouts, drop in on the World Convention in Berkeley the weekend of September 4, 5, 6 and 7. All your favorite writers, editors, artists, *etc. — or at least a large-scale quorum of them, including Poul Anderson,* Antony Boucher, Jack Vance, Frederik Pohl, Edmond Hamilton, James Blish. Interested? Write for information to Pacificon, P.O. Box 261, Fairmont Station, El Cerrito, California.

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MAXWELL'S MONKEY

by EDGAR PANGBORN

They weren't shadows — exactly. They also weren't human. They were, in fact, our consciences!

A shadow maybe. But now and then it went off to do something or get something, and came back into some slightly different position looking like a damn fool.

Maxwell saw it first on waking after a binge. During the evening's riot he had insulted his two dearest friends — the husband saw him home anyhow — and knocked over a baby-carriage. It had no baby in it, but Maxwell reflected it might have had, and wept. Then he was trying to pick a policeman's pocket and lamentably failing. He heard his friend explain: "Always does that, Officer. It don't mean a thing." But why would anyone go to the trouble of picking a policeman's pocket unless he meant something by it? And in the hurting morning light, the monkey sat on the foot of his bed.

He threw a pillow.

The pillow went through, unreasonably slowed down. You don't expect an object passing through a ghost to lose momentum. Maxwell said: "You are a semi-hallucinatory precipitation of gaseous particules, or a thing from outer space. Under either interpretation, your invasion of my domicile constitutes a tort." Maxwell was the most junior partner in the law firm of Bindle, Bindle, Bindle and Maxwell. "Get down off my bed."

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The monkey did so, tossed the pillow up on the covers, and resumed its earlier position.

"I see," said Maxwell. "You understand speech, you manipulate material objects although they don't necessarily manipulate you, and you prefer the letter to the spirit. Please get me an aspirin."

The monkey just sat there. It was black, tailless, the size of an Airedale, male. So far as Maxwell could tell it was young and healthy like himself, but probably not hung over.

Maxwell reeled to the bathroom. The monkey paralleled his movements, just out of reach — not that Maxwell felt much desire to grab. Maxwell washed down two aspirins. "Want one?" The monkey nodded, caught the tablet, and waited for Maxwell to get out of the bathroom and give him room. Maxwell removed the key and stood aside; the monkey entered; Maxwell sighed and locked him in.

The monkey returned through the keyhole and settled back into its normal shape, rumpled, irritated, and larger than before. "So you *were* hung over," said Maxwell, getting dressed. The monkey ignored that, imitating Maxwell's motions with the shirt. Since it had no clothes of its own and showed no inclination to steal Maxwell's, this appeared an empty ritual — shadow work.

For breakfast, Maxwell tossed the monkey some actual burned toast, but wasn't about to pour any extra coffee until the brute got a cup for himself and set it down within Maxwell's reach, looking miserable. Maxwell washed up, the monkey making theoretical motions at a safe distance from the tangible sink. Phony-casual, Maxwell asked: "By the way, how would you have proceeded if that bathroom door had had no keyhole? Or, say, a Yale lock?"

The monkey replied only by looking grave, which was the way he looked anyhow.

Maxwell could not avoid going to the office. As the most junior partner, he was expected to sweat out a serious quantity of dogwork to justify his existence in what the most senior Bindle described (often) as a situation of substantial trust. He told the monkey: "I am now about to go downstairs, out, and five stations uptown on the subway. I then walk from Lexington to Third and uptown two more blocks; elevator from main to ninth floor. Any comment? . . . No comment."

He stepped out, quickly closing the apartment door, which had a Yale lock.

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A block from the subway entrance the monkey caught up with him.

It had enlarged again, being now as tall as Maxwell, and was rubbing its left hip as if it might be a bit lame, and glowering.

It was one of those lush and tender mornings in May when New Yorkers find it a genuine pleasure to inhale grit. Those who passed Maxwell and his associate paid the monkey no more attention than they would have given to any offbeat shadow. Faint frowns, puzzled glances. One elderly lady opened her mouth but didn't speak. Politeness, Maxwell supposed. Nobody likes to stop a stranger and say: "Excuse me, sir, you may not have noticed — your shadow is looking more simian than you do this morning."

Or perhaps the monkey knew some extra-terrestrial means of co-operating with Maxwell's wish for obscurity. Decent of him to use it, if so. Descending the subway steps, Maxwell said over his shoulder: "Sorry about all those doors."

Understandably, the monkey went unnoticed in the subway crowds. At the moment of Maxwell's apology it had returned to the size of a child, and quit glowering.

At the office Maxwell hung up his hat in his own small room, leaving the door open for his usual early morning contemplation of the back of Sheila Walker's neck.

Miss Walker at twenty-nine was losing hope, but the back of her neck was exquisite.

She did not lack other prettiness of a spaniel-eyed, wistful sort. Though a competent receptionist and secretary to all four partners, she was developing a tendency to flutter and squeak. She recognized it herself with honest dismay. She also found herself clutching her mousy hair at demoralizing sounds, such as the long angry bray of H. K. Bindle clearing his throat for speech. This uproar was no worse than T. J. Bindle's sneeze, and F. W. Bindle, while dictating, scratched his left trouser-leg with dull sonority; so Miss Walker sometimes clutched her hair at all three. Pretty, Shelia at times became beautiful, when nobody was looking at her and she was looking at the back of Maxwell's neck. The back of Maxwell's neck was not exquisite; occasionally not even very clean.

When she noticed Maxwell's monkey following him into the office that morning she felt that to speak of it would be not only tactless but — well, difficult. She said: "Good morning, Max!" and smiled spaniel-eyed, slamming

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the typewriter carriage back and savoring the baritone boom of his "Yo, Sheila!" She too had gone through a bad time since waking — had indeed thought of talking things over with a well-heeled friend of hers who was just about halfway through her third psychoanalyst.

After Maxwell settled in his office, with the door open, she continued tearing away at a brief in the suit of one Jasper Baring against his grand-nephew Judson Baer for defamation of character. The said Judson Baer was alleged to have asserted loudly in a public place, to wit a bar, before six persons bearing witness, that the said Jasper Baring was not fit to carry guts to a bear. Her exquisite neck grew warmer and warmer up over the ears, and she got things all snarled up.

When she could bear it no longer, Sheila flung down her eraser and bravely stepped into Maxwell's office to ask him — flat-out, quickly, before her courage faded — how you spell "eligible." "I keep thinking it's two es, somewhere, but it never comes out looking right!"

"Mm, well, what's the context?" Maxwell asked — not intelligently, mostly in order to keep her in the office while he made up his mind about something.

"Well, it's what this old Jasper said about Jud — no, Judson about Jasper — wait, I'll get it, Max."

As she fluttered back to her desk, Maxwell was forced to abandon his last doubt. He was not even slightly hung over, and there were two monkeys in the room. His own, and the one standing in the doorway behind Sheila making desperate motions with imaginary papers.

Maxwell's monkey seemed to be more or less off duty, perhaps because Maxwell's desk chair stood close to the wall, which cramps the style of any shadow. Maxwell's monkey was in fact deeply interested in the other one. They were about the same size — quite a nice match, in a way.

"Here it is," said Sheila, fluttering back. "You see, H. K. felt we should have like a legal translation of what this old Judson said about — wait — 'being then and there at the site known as' — no, it's further on — here: 'defendant having then and there uttered expressions including the direct statement that plaintiff was not qualified or eligible to initiate or promote or perform the conveyance or transport of eviscerated material, to wit entrails' — oh, *look* how I spelled evis — oh — oh, damn!"

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"You poor kid," said Maxwell, and made it around his desk fairly fast, heedless of the flying pages of legal size.

The first kiss, intended partly as a consolation job, bounced off her nose. The second, even more complexly motivated, was amateur in execution but far more advanced in concept.

The monkeys too appeared to feel that at least one crisis in their own relations had been met and passed.

During those five or ten minutes — (this anyhow was the none too clear impression of both Shelia and Maxwell) — three persons passed the office door: F. W. Bindle, who seemed to note the embrace with mixed feelings, some of them green; F. W.'s father T. J. Bindle, who leered in a manner that could hardly be interpreted to mean anything but "Nice work Max!" and the most senior H. K. Bindle, who always noted everything that happened, but never said anything unless it could be expressed in sentences of not less than two hundred and fifty words.

A crisis passed usually means another one approached. A week after his monkey's first appearance Maxwell came to see me; not so much distressed as puzzled, not so much puzzled as angry. It took time and bourbon before he could work off those feelings of hostility and resentment which they say we should work off, no kidding.

He told his story coherently. As he talked and drank and brooded, his shadow was more disturbed than he was, but I could not reach any firm conclusion about it.

It has been suggested that they possess some means — possibly a ray, though I don't buy that — of unsettling the observer's vision at its source. I did feel inclined to fault my own visual perception, when Maxwell's shadow strolled off to the bathroom and Maxwell just sat there.

"We've checked out one thing for sure," he said. "It won't let you do anything you yourself think is wrong. I mean, it'll *let* you all right, but it gets bigger and meaner and uglier till a man can't stand it. But it goes by what *you* think, not by any other standards. Take cussing. I can't see anything wrong about a bit of normal cussing, so when I do it my monkey doesn't give a damn. But Sheila's got a thing about cussing, her own that is. Last time she let go with a little 'hell' or something — and with every provocation, mind you — a couple of other words came along for the ride, and her monkey — my God, I don't care to

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see that again! Sheila nearly passed out cold."

"You say there's been this — gradual growth?"

"All week long. If only you damn science-fiction writers would just —"

"Let's stay with the subject. Approximately how large is your shad — your monkey, right this moment?"

"Can't you see?"

"Not too clearly, I admit. (Cheers.)"

"That's evident. (What? Oh, cheers.) Why, he's about two gorillas' worth and uglier than dammit."

"And Sheila's?"

"Size of her maternal grandmother, approximately."

"Her maternal grandmother was — "

"Is. Stout. About medium-large grizzly size."

"And you feel that your conduct this week — "

"We've been good as gold. If you confounded science-fiction writers would —"

"Max, now hear this: we didn't invent outer space. It has been there all the time, and bugs me as much as you. Please stick to the subject."

"Sure; sure, that's how a man talks when he doesn't happen to have a monkey. Oh, well, we drove out across the river the other night and parked, and I admit my feelings ran away with me. Sheila's too I guess. But she said no, and — well, see, the monks had gone outside. No room for 'em on the back seat any more, they've grown so. And they were hulking around out there in the dark, and there's this sudden God-awful pounding on the top of the car as though some lunatic — "

"By which monkey was the pounding?"

"Sheila's. I stuck my head out and saw her. Eyes glow in the dark, damned if they don't. Coming home they rode outside on the roof, and we could see their feet stuck down through the rear windows, I suppose to keep the wind from blowing them away. If only it could!"

"The pounding occurred when Sheila said no?"

"About that time. You see? No pleasing them."

"In relation to Sheila what did you then do, Counselor?"

"Nothing but nothing, you crumb. She said no. If you damned science — "

"And you claim your own monkey is two gorillas' worth and growing all the time. Max, short of rubbing your two stupid noses in it, how could they make it any plainer?"

He made a show of thinking that over a long while, but the truth is that Maxwell is anything

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but stupid. He said at last: "See what you mean of course. But she still says no and she means it."

I said (and I think well enough of the remark so that I have it in a notebook and may use it again some time): "Max, of the many ways of persuading a woman to change her mind, sitting on your butt thinking sad thoughts is not one."

He left soon after that. I noticed how long it took his shadow to follow him after he slammed the door. He called me four hours later, at two in the morning, sounding peaceful and friendly.

All he had to say was: "They did too."

Now that we all have them, things aren't going too badly — maybe even a little better than they used to, as a matter of fact.

You should see Khrushchev's, honest. It probably shows the human race can get along with anything, if it has to. Almost anything.

Mine for instance is occupying the large armchair across the room from my typewriter, finishing up something or other (with *my* ball-point) and naturally I haven't a God-damn notion what he's produced.

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PRECIOUS ARTIFACT

BY PHILIP K. DICK

He had helped to rebuild dying Mars—now he could do the same for dead Earth!

Below the 'copter of Milt Biskle lay newly fertile lands. He had done well with his area of Mars, verdant from his reconstruction of the ancient water-network. Spring, two springs each year, had been brought to this autumn world of sand and hopping toads, a land once made of dried soil cracking with the dust of former times, of a dreary and unwatered waste. Victim of the recent Prox-Terra conflict.

Quite soon the first Terran emigrants would appear, stake their claims and take over. He could retire. Perhaps he could return to Terra or bring his own family here, receive priority of land-acquisition — as a reconstruct engineer he deserved it. Area Yellow had progressed far faster than the other engineers' sections. And now his reward came.

Reaching forward, Milt Biskle touched the button of his long-range transmitter. "This is Reconstruct Engineer Yellow," he said. "I'd like a psychiatrist. Any one will do, so long as he's immediately available."

When Milt Biskle entered the office Dr. DeWinter rose and held out his hand. "I've heard," Dr. DeWinter said,

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"that you, of all the forty odd reconstruct engineers, have been the most creative. It's no wonder you're tired. Even God had to rest after six days of such work, and you've been at it for years. As I was waiting for you to reach me I received a news memo from Terra that will interest you." He picked the memo up from his desk. "The initial transport of settlers is about to arrive here on Mars . . . and they'll go directly into your area. Congratulations, Mr. Biskle."

Rousing himself Milt Biskle said, "What if I returned to Earth?"

"But if you mean to stake a claim for your family, here —"

Milt Biskle said, "I want you to do something for me. I feel too tired, too —" He gestured. "Or depressed, maybe. Anyhow I'd like you to make arrangements for my gear, including my wug-plant, to be put aboard a transport returning to Terra."

"Six years of work," Dr. DeWinter said. "And now you're abandoning your recompense. Recently I visited Earth and it's just as you remember —"

"How do you know how I remember it?"

"Rather," DeWinter corrected himself smoothly, "I should say it's just as it was. Overcrowded, tiny conapts with seven families to a single cramped kitchen. Autobahns so crowded you can't make a move until eleven in the morning."

"For me," Milt Biskle said, "the overcrowding will be a relief after six years of robot autonomic equipment." He had made up his mind. In spite of what he had accomplished here, or perhaps because of it, he intended to go home. Despite the psychiatrist's arguments.

Dr. DeWinter purred, "What if your wife and children, Milt, are among the passengers of this first transport?" Once more he lifted a document from his neatly-arranged desk. He studied the paper, then said, "Biskle, Fay, Mrs. Laura C. June C. Woman and two girl children. Your family?"

"Yes," Milt Biskle admitted woodenly; he stared straight ahead.

"So you see you can't head back to Earth. Put on your hair and prepare to meet them at Field Three. And exchange your teeth. You've got the stainless steel ones in, at the moment."

Chagrined, Biskle nodded. Like all Terrans he had lost his hair and teeth from the fallout during the war. For everyday service in his lonely job of re-reconstructing Yellow Area of Mars he made no use of the expensive wig which he had brought from Terra, and as to

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the teeth he personally found the steel ones far more comfortable than the natural-color plastic set. It indicated how far he had drifted from social interaction. He felt vaguely guilty; Dr. DeWinter was right.

But he had felt guilty ever since the defeat of the Proxmen. The war had embittered him; it didn't seem fair that one of the two competing cultures would have to suffer, since the needs of both were legitimate.

Mars itself had been the locus of contention. Both cultures needed it as a colony on which to deposit surplus populations. Thank God Terra had managed to gain tactical mastery during the last year of the war . . . hence it was Terrans such as himself, and not Proxmen, patching up Mars.

"By the way," Dr. DeWinter said. "I happen to know of your intentions regarding your fellow reconstruct engineers."

Milt Biskle glanced up swiftly.

"As a matter of fact," De Winter said, "we know they're at this moment gathering in Red Area to hear your account." Opening his desk drawer he got out a yo-yo, stood up and began to operate it expertly doing *walking the dog*. "Your panic-stricken speech to the effect that something is wrong, although you can't seem to say just what it might be."

Watching the yo-yo Biskle said, "That's a toy popular in the Prox system. At least so I read in a homeopape article, once."

"Hmm. I understood it originated in the Philippines." Engrossed, Dr. DeWinter now did *around the world*. He did it well. "I'm taking the liberty of sending a deposition to the reconstruct engineers' gathering, testifying to your mental condition. It will be read aloud, — sorry to say."

"I still intend to address the gathering," Eiskle said.

"Well, then there's a compromise that occurs to me. Greet your little family when it arrives here on Mars and then we'll arrange a trip to Terra for you. At our expense. And in exchange you'll agree not to address the gathering of reconstruct engineers or burden them in any way with your nebulous forebodings." DeWinter eyed him keenly. "After all, this is a critical moment. The first emigrants are arriving. We don't want trouble; we don't want to make anyone uneasy."

"Would you do me a favor?" Biskle asked. "Show me that you've got a wig on. And that your teeth are false. Just so I can be sure that you're a Terran."

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Dr. DeWinter tilted his wig and plucked out his set of false teeth.

"I'll take the offer," Milt Biskle said. "If you'll agree to make certain that my wife obtains the parcel of land I set aside for her."

Nodding, DeWinter tossed him a small white envelope. "Here's your ticket. Round trip, of course, since you'll be coming back."

I hope so, Biskle thought as he picked up the ticket. But it depends on what I see on Terra. Or rather on what they *let* me see.

He had a feeling they'd let him see very little. In fact as little as Proxmanly possible.

When his ship reached Terra a smartly uniformed guide waited for him. "Mr. Biskle?" Trim and attractive and exceedingly young she stepped forward alertly. "I'm Mary Ableseth, your Tourplan companion. I'll show you around the planet during your brief stay here." She smiled brightly and very professionally. He was taken aback. "I'll be with you constantly, night and day."

"Night, too?" he managed to say.

"Yes. Mr. Biskle. That's my job. We expect you to be disoriented due to your years of labor on Mars... labor we of Terra applaud and honor, as is right." She fell in beside him, steering him toward a parked 'copter. "Where would you like to go first? New York City? Broadway? To the night clubs and theaters and restaurants..."

"No, to Central Park. To sit on a bench."

"But there is no more Central Park, Mr. Biskle. It was turned into a parking lot for government employees while you were on Mars."

"I see," Milt Biskle said. "Well, then Portsmouth Square in San Francisco will do." He opened the door of the 'copter.

"That, too, has become a parking lot," Miss Ableseth said, with a sad shake of her long, luminous red hair. "We're so darn overpopulated. Try again. Mr. Biskle; there are a few parks left, one in Kansas, I believe, and *two* in Utah in the south part near St. George."

"This is bad news," Milt said. "May I stop at that amphetamine dispenser and put in my dime? I need a stimulant to cheer me up."

"Certainly," Miss Ableseth said, nodding graciously.

Milt Biskle walked to the spaceport's nearby stimulant dispenser, reached into his pocket, found a dime, and dropped the dime in the slot.

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The dime fell completely through the dispenser and bounced onto the pavement.

"Odd," Biskle said, puzzled.

"I think I can explain that," Miss Ableseth said. "That dime of yours is a Martian dime, made for a lighter gravity."

"Hmm," Milt Biskle said, as he retrived the dime. As Miss Ableseth had predicted he felt disoriented. He stood by as she put in a dime of her own and obtained the small tube of amphetamine stimulants for him. Certainly her explanation seemed adequate. But —

"It is now eight p.m. local time," Miss Ableseth said. "And I haven't had dinner, although of course you have, aboard your ship. Why not take me to dinner? We can talk over a bottle of Pinot Noir and you can tell me these vague forebodings which have brought you to Terra, that something dire is wrong and that all your marvelous reconstruct work is pointless. I'd adore to hear about it." She guided him back to the 'copter and the two of them entered, squeezing into the back seat together. Milt Biskle found her to be warm and yielding, decidedly Terran; he became embarrassed and felt his heart pounding in effort-syndrome. It had been some time since he had been this close to a woman.

"Listen," he said, as the automatic circuit of the 'copter caused it to rise from the spaceport parking lot, "I'm married. I've got two children and I came here on business. I'm on Terra to prove that the Proxmen really won and that we few remaining Terrans are slaves of the Prox authorities, laboring for —" He gave up; it was hopeless. Miss Ableseth remained pressed against him.

"You really think," Miss Ableseth said presently, as the 'copter passed above New York City, "that I'm a Prox agent?"

"N-no," Milt Biskle said. "I guess not." It did not seem likely, under the circumstances.

"While you're on Terra," Miss Ableseth said, "why stay in an over-crowded, noisy hotel? Why not stay with me at my conapt in New Jersey? There's plenty of room and you're more than welcome."

"Okay," Biskle agreed, feeling the futility of arguing.

"Good." Miss Ableseth gave an instruction to the 'copter; it turned north. "We'll have dinner there. It'll save money, and at all the decent restaurants there's a two-hour line this time of night, so it's almost impossible to get a table. You've probably forgotten. How wonderful it'll be when half our population can emigrate!"

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"Yes," Biskle said tightly. "And they'll like Mars; we've done a good job." He felt a measure of enthusiasm returning to him, a sense of pride in the reconstruct work he and his compatriots had done. "Wait until you see it, Miss Ableseth."

"Call me Mary," Miss Ableseth said, as she arranged her heavy scarlet wig; it had become dislodged during the last few moments in the cramped quarters of the 'copter.

"Okay," Biskle said, and, except for a nagging awareness of disloyalty to Fay, he felt a sense of well-being.

"Things happen fast on Terra," Mary Ableseth said. "Due to the terrible pressure of overpopulation." She pressed her teeth in place; they, too, had become dislodged.

"So I see," Milt Biskle agreed, and straightened his own wig and teeth, too. *Could I have been mistaken?* he asked himself. After all he could see the lights of New York below; Terra was decidedly not a depopulated ruin and its civilization was intact.

Or was this all an illusion, imposed on his percept-system by Prox psychiatric techniques unfamiliar to him? It was a fact that his dime had fallen completely through the amphetamine dispenser. Didn't that indicate something was subtly, terribly wrong?

Perhaps the dispenser hadn't really been there.

The next day he and Mary Ableseth visited one of the few remaining parks. In the southern part of Utah, near the mountains, the park although small was bright green and attractive. Milt Biskle lolled on the grass watching a squirrel progressing toward a tree in wicket-like leaps, its tail flowing behind it in a gray stream.

"No squirrels on Mars," Milt Biskle said sleepily.

Wearing a slight sunsuit, Mary Ableseth stretched out on her back, eyes shut. "It's nice here, Milt. I imagine Mars is like this." Beyond the park heavy traffic moved along the freeway; the noise reminded Milt of the surf of the Pacific Ocean. It lulled him. All seemed well, and he tossed a peanut to the squirrel. The squirrel veered, wicket-hopped toward the peanut, its intelligent face twitching in response.

As it sat upright, holding the nut, Milt Biskle tossed a second nut off to the right. The squirrel heard it land among the maple leaves; its ears pricked up, and this reminded Milt of a game he once had played with a cat, an old sleepy tom which had

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belonged to him and his brother in the days before Terra had been so overpopulated, when pets were still legal. He had waited until Pumpkin — the tomcat — was almost asleep and then he had tossed a small object into the corner of the room. Pumpkin woke up. His eyes had flown open and his ears had pricked, turned, and he had sat for fifteen minutes listening and watching, brooding as to what had made the noise. It was a harmless way of teasing the old cat, and Milt felt sad, thinking how many years Pumpkin had been dead, now, his last legal pet. On Mars, though, pets would be legal again. That cheered him.

In fact on Mars, during his years of reconstruct work, he had possessed a pet. A Martian plant. He had brought it with him to Terra and it now stood on the living room coffee table in Mary Ableseth's conapt, its limbs draped rather unhappily. It had not prospered in the unfamiliar Terran climate.

"Strange," Milt murmured, "that my wug-plant isn't thriving. I'd have thought in such a moist atmosphere . . ."

"It's the gravity," Mary said, eyes still shut, her bosom rising and falling regularly. She was almost asleep. "Too much for it."

Milt regarded the supine form of the woman, remembering Pumpkin under similar circumstances. The hypnogogic moment, between waking and sleeping, when consciousness and unconsciousness became blended . . . reaching, he picked up a pebble.

He tossed the pebble into the leaves near Mary's head.

At once she sat up, eyes open, startled, her sunsuit falling from her.

Both her ears pricked up.

"But we Terrans," Milt said, "have lost control of the musculature of our ears, Mary. On even a reflex basis."

"What?" she murmured, blinking in confusion as she retied her sunsuit.

"Our ability to prick up our ears has atrophied," Milt explained. "Unlike the dog and cat. Although to examine us morphologically you wouldn't know because the muscles are still there. So you made an error."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mary said, with a trace of sullenness. She turned her attention entirely to arranging the bra of her sunsuit, ignoring him.

"Let's go back to the conapt," Milt said, rising to his feet. He no longer felt like lolling in the park, because he could no long-

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er believe in the park. Unreal squirrel, unreal grass . . . was it actually? Would they ever show him the substance beneath the illusion? He doubted it.

The squirrel followed them a short way as they walked to their parked 'copter, then turned its attention to a family of Terrans which included two small boys; the children threw nuts to the squirrel and it scampered in vigorous activity.

"Convincing," Milt said. And it really was.

Mary said, "Too bad you couldn't have seen Dr. DeWinter more, Milt. He could have helped you." Her voice was oddly hard.

"I have no doubt of that," Milt Biskle agreed as they reentered the parked 'copter.

When they arrived back at Mary's conapt he found his Martian wug-plant dead. It had evidently perished of dehydration.

"Don't try to explain this," he said to Mary as the two of them stood gazing down at the parched, dead stalks of the once active plant. "You know what it shows. Terra is supposedly more humid than Mars, even reconstructed Mars at its best. Yet this plant has completely dried out. There's no moisture left on Terra because I suppose the Prox blasts emptied the seas. Right?"

Mary said nothing.

"What I don't understand," Milt said, "is why it's worth it to you people to keep the illusion going. *I've finished my job.*"

After a pause Mary said, "May be there're more planets requiring reconstruct work, Milt."

"Your population is that great?"

"I was thinking of Terra. Here," Mary said "Reconstruct work on it will take generations; all the talent and ability you reconstruct engineers possess will be required." She added, "I'm just following your hypothetical logic, of course."

"So Terra's our next job. That's why you let me come here. In fact I'm going to *stay* here." He realized that, thoroughly and utterly, in a flash of insight. "I won't be going back to Mars and I won't see Fay again. You're replacing her." It all made sense.

"Well," Mary said, with a faint wry smile, "let's say I'm attempting to." She stroked his arm. Barefoot, still in her sunsuit, she moved slowly closer and closer to him.

Frightened, he backed away from her. Picking up the dead wug-plant he numbly carried it to the apt's disposal chute and dropped the brittle, dry remains in. They vanished at once.

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"And now," Mary said busily, "we're going to visit the Museum of Modern Art in New York and then, if we have time, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. They've asked me to keep you busy so you don't start brooding."

"But I am brooding," Milt said as he watched her change from her sunsuit to a gray wool knit dress. Nothing can stop that, he said to himself. And you know it now. And as each reconstruct engineer finishes his area it's going to happen again. I'm just the first.

At least I'm not alone, he realized. And felt somewhat better.

"How do I look?" Mary asked as she put on lipstick before the bedroom mirror.

"Fine," he said listlessly, and wondered if Mary would meet each reconstruct engineer in turn, become the mistress of each. Not only is she not what she seems, he thought, but I don't even get to keep her.

It seemed a gratuitous loss, easily avoided.

He was, he realized, beginning to like her. *Mary was alive;* that much was real. Terran or not. At least they had not lost the war to shadows; they had lost to authentic living organisms. He felt somewhat cheered.

"Ready for the Museum of Modern Art?" Mary said briskly, with a smile.

Later, at the Smithsonian, after he had viewed the Spirit of St. Louis and the Wright brothers' incredibly ancient plane — it appeared to be at least a million years old — he caught sight of an exhibit which he had been anticipating.

Saying nothing to Mary — she was absorbed in studying a case of semi-precious stones in their natural uncut state — he slipped off and, a moment later, stood before a glass-walled section entitled

PROX MILITARY OF 2014

Three Prox soldiers stood frozen, their dark muzzles stained and grimy, side arms ready, in a makeshift shelter composed of the remains of one of their transports. A bloody Prox flag hung drably. This was a defeated enclave of the enemy; these three creatures were about to surrender or be killed.

A group of Terran visitors stood before the exhibit, gawking. Milt Biskle said to the man nearest him, "Convincing, isn't it?"

"Sure is," the man, middle-aged, with glasses and gray hair, agreed. "Were you in the war?" he asked Milt, glancing at him.

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"I'm in reconstruct," Milt said. "Yellow Engineer."

"Oh." The man nodded, impressed. "Boy, those Proxmen look scary. You'd almost expect them to step out of that exhibit and fight us to the death." He grinned. "They put up a good fight before they gave in, those Proxmen; you have to give 'em credit for that."

Beside him the man's gray, taut wife said, "Those guns of theirs make me shiver. It's too realistic." Disapproving, she walked on.

"You're right," Milt Biskle said. "They do look frighteningly real, because of course they are." There was no point in creating an illusion of this sort because the genuine thing lay immediately at hand, readily available. Milt swung himself under the guard rail, reached the transparent glass of the exhibit, raised his foot and smashed the glass; it burst and rained down with a furious racket of shivering fragments.

As Mary came running, Milt snatched a rifle from one of the frozen Proxmen in the exhibit and turned it toward her.

She halted, breathing rapidly, eyeing him but saying nothing.

"I am willing to work for you," Milt said to her, holding the rifle expertly. "After all, if my own race no longer exists I can hardly reconstruct a colony world for them; even I can see that. But I want to know the truth. Show it to me and I'll go on with my job."

Mary said, "No, Milt, if you knew the truth you wouldn't go on. You'd turn that gun on yourself." She sounded calm, even compassionate, but her eyes were bright and enlarged, wary.

"Then I'll kill you," he said. And, after that, himself.

"Wait." She pondered. "Milt — this is so difficult. You know absolutely nothing and yet look how miserable you are. How do you expect to feel when you can see your planet as it is? It's almost too much for me and I'm —" She hesitated.

"Say it."

"I'm just a —" she choked out the word — "a visitor."

"But I am right," he said. "Say it. Admit it."

"You're right, Milt," she sighed.

Two uniformed museum guards appeared, holding pistols. "You okay, Miss Ableseth?"

"For the present," Mary said. She did not take her eyes off Milt and the rifle which he held. "Just wait," she instructed the guards.

"Yes ma'am." The guards waited. No one moved.

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Milt said, "Did any Terran women survive?"

After a pause Mary said, "No, Milt. But we Proxmen are within the same genus, as you well know. We can interbreed. Doesn't that make you feel better?"

"Sure," he said. "A lot better." And he did feel like turning the rifle on himself now, without waiting. It was all he could do to resist the impulse. So he had been right; that thing had not been Fay, there at Field Three on Mars. "Listen," he said to Mary Ableseth, "I want to go back to Mars again. I came here to learn something, I learned it, now I want to go back. Maybe I'll talk to Dr. DeWinter again. maybe he can help me. Any objection to that?"

"No." She seemed to understand how he felt. "After all, you did all your work there. You have a right to return. But eventually you have to begin here on Terra. We can wait a year or so, perhaps even two. But eventually Mars will be filled up and we'll need the room. And it's going to be so much harder here . . . as you'll discover." She tried to smile but failed; he saw the effort. "I'm sorry, Milt."

"So am I," Milt Biskle said. "Hell, I was sorry when that wug-plant died. I knew the truth then. It wasn't just a guess."

"You'll be interested to know that your fellow reconstruct engineer Red, Cleveland Andre, addressed the meeting in your place. And passed your intimations on to them all, along with his own. They voted to send an official delegate here to Terra to investigate; he's on his way now."

"I'm interested," Milt said. "But it doesn't really matter. It hardly changes things." He put down the rifle. "Can I go back to Mars now?" He felt tired. "Tell Dr. DeWinter I'm coming." Tell him, he thought to have every psychiatric technique in this repertory ready for me, because it will take a lot. "What about Earth's animals?" he asked. "Did any forms at all survive? How about the dog and the cat?"

Mary glanced at the museum guards; a flicker of communication passed silently between them and then Mary said, "Maybe it's all right after all."

"What's all right?" Milt Biskle said.

"For you to see. Just for a moment You seem to be standing up to it better than we had expected. In our opinion you *are* entitled to that." She added, "Yes, Milt, the dog and cat survived; they live here among the ruins. Come along and look."

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He followed after her, thinking to himself, Wasn't she right the first time? Do I really want to look? Can I stand up to what exists in actuality — what they've felt the need of keeping from me up until now?

At the exit ramp of the museum Mary halted and said, "Go on outside, Milt. I'll stay here. I'll be waiting for you when you come back in."

Haltingly, he descended the ramp.

And saw.

It was, of course, as she had said, ruins. The city had been decapitated, leveled three feet above ground-level; the buildings had become hollow square, without contents, like some infinite arrangement of useless, ancient courtyards. He could not believe that what he saw was *new*; it seemed to him as if these abandoned remnants had always been there, exactly as they were now. And — how long would they remain this way?

To the right an elaborate but small-scale mechanical system had plopped itself down to a debris-filled street. As he watched, it extended a host of pseudopodia which burrowed inquisitively into the nearby foundations. The foundations, steel and cement, were abruptly pulverized; the bare ground, exposed, lay naked and dark brown, seared over from the atomic heat generated by the repair autonomic rig — a construct, Milt Biskle thought, not much different from those I employ on Mars. At least to some meager extent the rig had the task of clearing away the old. He knew from his own reconstruct work on Mars that it would be followed, probably within minutes, by an equally elaborate mechanism which would lay the groundwork for the new structures to come.

And, standing off to one side in the otherwise deserted street, watching this limited clearing-work in progress, two gray, thin figures could be made out. Two hawk-nosed Proxmen with their pale, natural hair arranged in high coils, their earlobes elongated with heavy weights.

The victors, he thought to himself. Experiencing the satisfaction of this spectacle, witnessing the last artifacts of the defeated race being obliterated. Some day a purely Prox city will rise up here: Prox architecture, streets of the odd, wide Prox pattern, the uniform boy-like buildings with their many subsurface levels. And citizens such as these will be treading the ramps, accepting the high-speed runnels in their daily routines. And what, he thought, about the Terran dogs and cats which now in-

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habit these ruins, as Mary said? Will even they disappear? Probably not entirely. There will be room for them, perhaps in museums and zoos, as oddities to be gaped at. Survivals of an ecology which no longer obtained. Or even mattered.

And yet — Mary was right. The Proxman were within the same genus. Even if they did not interbreed with the remaining Terrans the species as he had known it would go on. And they would interbreed, he thought. His own relationship with Mary was a harbinger. As individuals they were not so far apart. The results might even be good.

The results, he thought as he turned away and started back into the museum, may be a race not quite Prox and not quite Terran; something that is genuinely new may come from the melding. At least we can hope so.

Terra would be rebuilt. He had seen slight but real work in progress with his own eyes. Perhaps the Proxmen lacked the skill that he and his fellow reconstruct engineers possessed . . . but now that Mars was virtually done they could begin here. It was not absolutely hopeless. Not *quite*.

Walking up to Mary he said hoarsely, "Do me a favor. Get me a cat I can take back to Mars with me. I've always liked cats. Especially the orange ones with stripes."

One of the museum guards, after a glance at his companion, said, "We can arrange that, Mr. Biskle. We can get a — cub, is that the word?"

"Kitten, I think," Mary corrected.

On the trip back to Mars, Milt Biskle sat with the box containing the orange kitten on his lap, working out his plans. In fifteen minutes the ship would land on Mars and Dr. DeWinter — or the thing that posed as Dr. DeWinter anyhow — would be waiting to meet him. And it would be too late. From where he sat he could see the emergency escape hatch with its red warning light. His plans had become focused around the hatch. It was not ideal but it would serve.

In the box the orange kitten reached up a paw and batted at Milt's hand. He felt the sharp, tiny claws rake across his hand and he absently disengaged his flesh, retreating from the probing reach of the animal. You wouldn't have liked Mars anyhow, he thought, and rose to his feet.

Carrying the box he strode swiftly toward the emergency hatch. Before the stewardess

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could reach him he had thrown open the hatch. He stepped forward and the hatch locked behind him. For an instant he was within the cramped unit, and then he began to twist open the heavy outer door.

"Mr. Biskle!" the stewardess' voice came, muffled by the door behind him. He heard her fumbling to reach him, opening the door and groping to catch hold of him.

As he twisted open the outer door the kitten within the box under his arm snarled.

You, too? Milt Biskle thought, and paused.

Death, the emptiness and utter lack of warmth of 'tween space, seeped around him, filtering past the partly opened outer door. He smelled it and something within him, as in the kitten, retreated by instinct. He paused, holding the box, not trying to push the outer door any farther open, and in that moment the stewardess grabbed him.

"Mr. Biskle," she said with a half-sob, "are you out of your mind? Good God what are you doing?" She managed to tug the outer door shut, screw the emergency section back into shut position.

"You know exactly what I'm doing," Milt Biskle said as he allowed her to propel him back into the ship and to his seat. And don't think you stopped me, he said to himself. Because it wasn't you. I could have gone ahead and done it. But I decided not to.

He wondered why.

Later, at Field Three on Mars, Dr. DeWinter met him as he had expected.

The two of them walked to the parked 'copter and DeWinter in a worried tone of voice said, "I've just been informed that during the trip —"

"That's right. I attempted suicide. But I changed my mind. Maybe you know why. You're the psychologist, the authority as to what goes on inside us." He entered the 'copter, being careful not to bang the box containing the Terran kitten.

"You're going to go ahead and stake your land parcel with Fay?" Dr. DeWinter asked presently as the 'copter flew above green, wet fields of high protein wheat. "Even though — you know?"

"Yes." He nodded. After all, there was nothing else for him, as far as he could make out.

"You Terrans." DeWinter shook his head. "Admirable." Now he noticed the box on Milt Biskle's lap. "What's that you have there? A creature from Terra?" He eyed it suspiciously;

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obviously to him it was the manifestation of an alien form of life. "A rather peculiar-looking organism."

"It's going to keep me company," Milt Biskle said. "While I go on with my work, either building up my private parcel or —" Or helping you Proxmen with Terra, he thought.

"Is that what was called a 'rattlesnake'? I detect the sound of its rattles." Dr. DeWinter edged away.

"It's purring." Milt Biskle stroked the kitten as the autonomic circuit of the 'copter guided it across the dully red Martian sky. Contact with the one familiar life-form, he realized, will keep me sane. It will make it possible for me to go on. He felt grateful. My race may have been defeated and destroyed, but not all Terran creatures have perished. When we reconstruct Terra maybe we can induce the authorities to allow us to set up game preserves. We'll make that part of our task, he told himself, and again he patted the kitten. At least we can hope for that much.

Next to him, Dr. DeWinter was also deep in thought. He appreciated the intricate workmanship, by engineers stationed on the third planet, which had gone into the simulacrum resting in the box on Milt Biskle's lap. The technical achievement was impressive, even to him, and he saw clearly — as Milt Biskle of course did not. This artifact, accepted by the Terran as an authentic organism from his familiar past, would provide a pivot by which the man would hang onto his psychic balance.

But what about the other reconstruct engineers? What would carry each of them through and past the moment of discovery as each completed his work and had to — whether he liked it or not — awake?

It would vary from Terran to Terran. A dog for one, a more elaborate simulacrum, possibly that of a nubile human female, for another. In any case each would be provided with an "exception" to the true state. One essential surviving entity, selected out of what had in fact totally vanished. Research into the past of each engineer would provide the clue, as it had in Biskle's instance; the cat-simulacrum had been finished weeks before his abrupt, panic-stricken trip home to Terra. For instance, in Andre's case a parrot-simulacrum was already under construction. It would be done by the time he made *his* trip home.

"I call him Thunder," Milt Biskle explained.

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"Good name," Dr. DeWinter — as he titled himself these days — said. And thought, A shame we could not have shown him the real situation on Terra. Actually it's quite interesting that he accepted what he saw, because on some level he must realize that nothing survives a war of the kind we conducted. Obviously he desperately wanted to believe that a remnant, even though no more than rubble, endures. But it's typical of the Terran mind to fasten onto phantoms. That might help explain their defeat in the conflict; they were simply not realists.

"This cat," Milt Biskle said, "is going to be a mighty hunter of Martian sneak-mice."

"Right," Dr. DeWinter agreed, and thought, *As long as its batteries don't run down.* He, too, patted the kitten.

A switch closed and the kitten purred louder.

— PHILIP K. DICK

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Harry Harrison, who wrote *Deathworld, How the Old World Died* (in this issue) and a great many other first-rate science-fiction stories, gives us a complete short novel in our next *Galaxy*. It is about an immense interstellar war. Cultures clash. Huge fleets raven at each other. Casualties mount at the speed of light. It is, in short, a space-war yarn in the classic tradition . . . except that Harrison, who is a very funny man, began chuckling to himself as he put the first page on paper. And the result is something to see. Now, we don't promise that *The Starloggers* will inspire you or make you a Better Person . . . but we are prepared to bet it will make you laugh out loud!

Backing it up are a pair of noteworthy novelettes, too: Wyman Guin's *A Man of the Renaissance* and Lester del Rey's *To Avenge Man*. Good issue, we think. Don't miss it!

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THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT

by FREDERIK POHL

ILLUSTRATED BY FINLAY

Waging war from star to star is expensive, long-lasting — and remarkably hard to stop!

I

"We met before," I told Haber. "In 1988, when you were running the Des Moines office."

He beamed and held out his hand. "Why, darn it, so we did! I remember now, Odin."

"I don't like to be called Odin."

"No? All right. Mr. Gunnarsen — "

"Not 'Mr. Gunnarsen', either. Just 'Gunner.' "

"That's right, Gunner; I'd almost forgotten."

I said, "No, you hadn't forgotten. You never knew my name in Des Moines. You didn't even know I was alive, because you were too busy losing the state

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for our client. I pulled you out of that one, just like I'm going to pull you out now."

The smile was a little cracked, but Haber had been with the company a long time and he wasn't going to let me throw him. "What do you want me to say, Gunner? I'm grateful. Believe me, boy, I know I need help —"

"And I'm not your boy. Haber, you were a fat cat then, and you're a fat cat now. All I want from you is, first, a quick look around the shop here and, second, a conference of all department heads, including you, in thirty minutes. So tell your secretary to round them up, and let's get started on the sightseeing."

Coming in to Belport on the scatjet I had made a list of things to do. The top item was:

1. Fire Haber.

Still, in my experience that isn't always the best way to put out a fire. Some warts you remove, some you just let wither away in obscurity. I am not paid by M&B to perform cosmetic surgery on their Habers, only to see that the work the Habers should have done gets accomplished.

As a public relations branch manager he was a wart, but as a tourist guide he was fine, although he was perspiring. He led me all around the shop. He had taken a storefront on one of the main shopping malls, air-curtain door, windows draped tastefully in gray silk. It looked like the best of four funeral parlors in a run-down neighborhood. In gilt letters on the window was the name of the game:

MOULTRIE AND BIGELOW
Public Relations
Northern Lake State Division
T. Wilson Haber, Division Manager

"Public relations," he informed me, "starts at home. They know we're here, eh, Gunner?"

"Reminds me of the Iowa office," I said, and he stumbled where there wasn't even a sill. That was the presidential campaign of '88, where Haber had been trying to carry the state for the candidate who had retained us, and those twelve electoral votes came over at the last minute only because we sent Haber to Nassau to rest and I took over from him. I believe Haber's wife had owned stock in the company.

His Belport layout was pretty good at that, though. Four pry booths, each with a Simplex 9090 and an operator-receptionist in

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the donor's waiting room. You can't tell from appearances, but the donors who were waiting for their interrogation looked like a good representative sample — a good mixture of sexes, ages, conditions of affluence — and with proper attention to weighing he should at least be getting a fair survey of opinions. Integration of the pry-scores was in a readout station in back — I recognized one of the programmers and nodded to him: good man — along with telefax equipment to the major research sources, the Britannica, Library of Congress, news-wire services and so on. From the integration room the readout operator could construct a speech, a 3-V commercial, a space ad or anything else, with the research lines to feed him any data he needed, and test its appeal on his subjects. In the front of the building was a taping booth and studio. Everything was small and semi-portable, but good stuff. You could put together a 3-V interview or edit one as well here as you could on the lot in the Home Office.

"An A-Number One setup, right, Gunner?" said Haber. "Set it up myself to do the job."

I said. "Then why aren't you doing it?" He tightened up. The eyes looked smaller and more intelligent, but he didn't say anything directly. He took my elbow and turned me to the data-processing room.

"Want you to meet someone," he said, opened the door, led me inside and left me.

A tall, slim girl looked up from a typer. "Why, hello, Gunner," she said. "It's been a long time."

I said, "Hello, Candace."

Apparently Haber was not quite such a fat cat as he had seemed, for he had clearly found out a little something about my personal life before I showed up in his office. The rest of the list I had scribbled down in the scat-jet was:

2. Need "big lie".
3. Investigate Children.
4. Investigate opponents proposition.
5. Marry Candace Harmon?

This was a relatively small job for Moultrie & Bigelow, but it was for a very, very big account. It was important to win it. The client was the Arcturan Confederacy.

In the shop the word was that they had been turned down by three or four other PR agencies before we took them on. Nobody said why, exactly, but the reason was perfectly clear. It was just because they were the Arcturan Confederacy. There is nothing in any way illegal or

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immoral about a public-relations firm representing a foreign account. That is a matter of statute — as most people don't take the trouble to know: the Smith-Macchioni Act of '71. And the courts held that it applied to extra-planetary "foreigners" as well as to Terrestrials in 1985, back when the only "intelligent aliens" were the mummies on Mars. Not that the mummies had ever hired anybody on Earth to do anything for them. But it was Moultrie & Bigelow's law department that sued for the declaratory judgement, as a matter of fact. Just on the off chance. That's how M&B operates.

Any public-relations man takes on the color of his clients in the eyes of some people. That's the nature of the beast. The same people wouldn't think of blaming a surgeon because he dissolved a malignancy out of Public Enemy No. 1, or even a lawyer for defending him. But when you are in charge of a client's emotional image, and that image isn't liked, some of the dislike rubs off on you.

At M&B there is enough in the paycheck at the end of every month so that we don't mind that. M&B has a reputation for taking on the tough ones — the only surviving American cigarette manufacturer is ours. So is the exiled Castroite government of Cuba, that still thinks it might one day get the State Department to back up its claim for paying off on the bonds it printed for itself. However, for two reasons — as a simple matter of making things easy for ourselves; and because it's better doctrine — we don't flaunt our connection with the unpopular clients. Especially when the job is going badly. One of the surest ways to get a bad public response to PR is to let the public know that some hotshot PR outfit is working on it.

So every last thing Haber had done was wrong.

In this town, it was too late for pry booths and M/R.

I had just five minutes left before the conference, and I spent it in the pry-booth section anyhow. I noticed a tri-D display of our client's home planet in the reception room, where donors were sitting and waiting their turn. It was very attractive: the wide, calm seas with the vertical air-mount islets jutting out at intervals.

I turned around and walked out fast, boiling mad.

A layman might not have seen just how many ways Haber had found to go wrong. The whole pry-booth project was probably a mistake anyway. To begin with,

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to get any good out of pry booths you need depth interviews, way deep-down M/R stuff. And for that you need paid donors, lots of them. And to get them you have to have a panel to pick from.

That means advertising in the papers and on the nets and interviewing twenty people for every one you hire. To get a satisfactory sample in a town the size of Belport you need to hire maybe fifty donors. And that means talking to a thousand people, every one of whom will go home and talk to his wife or her mother or their neighbors.

In a city like Chicago or Saskatoon you can get away with it. With good technique the donor never really knows what he's being interviewed *for*, although of course a good newspaperman or private eye can interview a couple of donors and work backward from the sense-impulse stimuli with pretty fair accuracy. But not in Belport, not when we never had a branch here before, not when every living soul in town knew what we were doing because the rezoning ordinance was Topic One over every coffee table. In short, we had tipped our hand completely.

As I say, an amateur might not have spotted that. But Haber was not supposed to be an amateur.

I had just seen the trend-charts, too. The referendum on granting rezoning privileges to our client was going to a vote in less than two weeks. When Haber had opened the branch, sampling showed that it would fail by a four to three vote. Now, a month and a half later, he had worsened the percentage to three to two and going downhill all the way.

Our client would be extremely unhappy — probably was unhappy already, if they had managed to puzzle out the queer terrestrial progress reports we had been sending them.

And this was the kind of client that a flackery didn't want to have unhappy. I mean, all the others were little-league stuff in comparison. The Arcturan Confederacy was a culture as wealthy and as powerful as all Earth governments combined, and as Arcturans don't bother with nonsense like national governments or private enterprise, at least not in any way that makes sense to us, this one client was —

As big as every other *possible* client combined.

They were the ones who decided they needed this base in Belport, and it was up to M&B — and specifically to me, Odin Gunnarsen — to see that they got it.

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It was too bad that they had been fighting Earth six months earlier.

In fact, in a technical sense we were still at war. It was only armistice, not a peace, that had called off the H-bomb raids and the fleet engagements.

Like I say. M&B takes on the tough ones!

Besides Haber, four of the staff looked as though they knew which end was up. Candace Harmon, the pry-integration programmer and two very junior T.A.s. I took the head chair at the conference table without waiting to see where Haber would want to sit and said, "We'll make this fast, because we're in trouble here and we don't have time to be polite. You're Percy?" That was the programmer; he nodded. "And I didn't catch your name?" I said, turning to the next along the table. It was the copy chief, a lanky shave-headed oldster named Tracy Spockman. His assistant, one of the T.A.s I had had my eye on, turned out to be named Manny Brock.

I had picked easy jobs for all the deadheads, reserving the smart ones for whatever might turn up, so I started with the copy chief. "Spockman, we're opening an Arcturan purchasing agency and you're it. You should be able to handle this one; if I remember correctly, you ran the Duluth shop for a year."

He sucked on a cal pipe without expression. "Well, thanks, Mr. Gun — "

"Just Gunner."

"Well, thanks, but as copy chief — "

"Manny here should be able to take care of that, If I remember the way you ran the Duluth operation, you've probably got things set up so he can step right in." And so he probably did. At least, it surely would do no real harm to give somebody else a chance at lousing things up. I handed Spockman the "positions wanted" page from the paper I'd picked up at the scatport and a scrawled list of notes I'd made up on the way in. "Hire these girls I've marked for your staff, rent an office and get some letters out. You'll see what I want from the list. Letters to every real estate dealer in town, asking them if they can put together a five thousand acre parcel in the area covered by the zoning referendum. Letter to every general contractor, asking for bids on buildings. Make it separate bids on each — I think there'll be five buildings altogether. One exoclimatized — so get the air-conditioning, heating and plumbing contractors to bid, too. Letter to every food whole-

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saler and major grocery outlet asking if they are interested in bidding on supplying Arcturans with food. Fax Chicago for what the Arcturans fancy, I don't remember — no meat, I think, but a lot of green vegetables — anyway, find out and include the data in the letters. Electronics manufacturers, office equipment dealers, car and truck agencies — well, the whole list is on that piece of paper. I want every businessman in Belport starting to figure out by tomorrow morning how much profit he might make on an Acturan base. Got it?"

"I think so, Mr. — Gunner. I was thinking. How about stationery suppliers, attornies, C.P.-A's?"

"Don't ask, do it. Now, you down at the end there — "

"Henry Dane, Gunner."

"Henry, what about club outlets in Belport? I mean specialized groups. The Arcturans are hot for navigation, sailing, like that; see what you can do with the motorboat clubs and so on. I noticed in the paper that there's a flower show at the Armory next Saturday. It's pretty late, but squeeze in a speaker on Arcturan fungi. We'll fly in a display. They tell me Arcturans are hot gardeners when they're home—love all the biological sciences—nice folks, like to dabble." I hesitated and looked at my notes. "I have something down here about veterans' groups, but I haven't got the handle for it. Still, if you can think of an angle, let me know—what's the matter?"

He was looking doubtful. "It's only that I don't want to conflict with Candy, Gunner."

And so, of course, I had to face up to things and turn to Candace Harmon. "What's that, honey?" I asked.

"I think Henry means my Arcturan-American Friendship League." It turned out that that had been one of Haber's proudest ideas. I wasn't surprised. After several weeks and about three thousand dollars it had worked up to a total of forty-one members. How many of those were employees of the M&B branch? "Well, all but eight," Candace admitted at once. She wasn't smiling, but she was amused.

"Don't worry about it," I advised Henry Dane. "We're folding the Arcturan - American Friendship League anyway. Candace won't have time for it. She'll be working with me."

"Why, fine, Gunner," she said. "Doing what?"

I almost did marry Candace one time, and every once in a while since I have wished I hadn't backed away. A very good thing was Candace Harmon.

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"Doing," I said, "what Gunner says for you to do. Let's see. First thing, I've got five hundred Arcturan domestic animals coming in tomorrow. I haven't seen them, but they tell me they're cute, look like kittens, are pretty durable. Figure out some way of getting them distributed fast—maybe a pet shop will sell them for fifty cents each."

Haber protested, "My dear Gunner! The freight alone—"

"Sure, Haber, they cost about forty dollars apiece just to get them here. Any other questions like that? No? That's good. I want one in each of five hundred homes by the end of the week, and if I had to pay a hundred dollars to each customer to take them, I'd pay. Next: I want somebody to find me a veteran, preferably disabled, preferably who was actually involved in the bombing of the home planet—"

I laid out a dozen more working lines, an art show of the Arcturan bas-relief stuff that was partly to look at but mostly to feel, a 3-V panel show on Arcturus that we could plant . . . the whole routine. None of it would do the job, but all of it would help until I got my bearings. Then I got down to business. "What's the name of this fellow that's running for councilman, Connick?"

"That's right," said Haber.

"What've you got on him?" I asked.

I turned to Candace, who said promptly, "Forty-one years old, Methodist, married, three kids of his own plus one of the casualties, ran for State Senate last year and lost, but he carried Belport, running opposed to the referendum this year, very big in Junior Chamber of Commerce and V.F.W.—"

"No. What've you got *on* him?" I persisted.

Candace said slowly, "Gunner, look. This is a nice guy."

"Why, I know that, honey. I read his piece in the paper today. So now tell me the dirt that he can't afford to have come out."

"It wouldn't be fair to destroy him for nothing!"

I brushed aside the "fair" business. "What do you mean, 'for nothing'?"

"We're not going to win this referendum, you know."

"Honey, I've got news for you. This is the biggest account anybody ever had and I want it. We *will* win. What've you got on Connick?"

"Nothing. Really nothing," she said quietly.

"But you can get it."

Candace said, visibly upset, "Of course, there's probably some—"

"Of course. Get it. Today."

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II

But I wasn't relying totally on anyone, not even Candace. Since Connick was the central figure of the opposition I caught a cab and went to see him.

It was already dark, a cold, clear night, and over the mushroom towers of the business district a quarter-moon was beginning to rise. I looked at it almost with affection, I had hated it so when I was there.

As I paid the cab two kids in snowsuits came sidling out to inspect me. I said, "Hello. Is your Daddy home?"

One was about five, with freckles and bright blue eyes; the other was darker, brown-eyed, and he had a limp. The blue-eyed one said, "Daddy's down in the cellar. Mommy will let you in if you ring the doorbell. Just push that button."

"Oh, that's how those things work. Thanks." Connick's wife turned out to be a good-looking, skinny blonde in her thirties; and the kids must have raced around the back way and alerted the old man, because as she was taking my coat he was already coming through the hall.

I shook his hand and said, "I can tell by the smells from your kitchen that it's dinner time. I won't keep you. My name is Gunnarsen and—"

"And you're from Moultrie and Bigelow—here, sit down, Mr. Gunnarsen—and you want to know if I won't think it over and back the Arcturan base. No, Mr. Gunnarsen, I won't. But why don't you have a drink with me before dinner? And then why don't you have dinner?"

He was a genuine article, this Connick. I had to admit he had caught me off balance.

"Why, I don't mind if I do," I said after a moment. "I see you know why I'm here."

He was pouring drinks. "Well, not altogether, Mr. Gunnarsen. You don't really think you'll change my mind, do you?"

"I can't say that until I know why you oppose the base in the first place, Connick. That's what I want to find out."

He handed me a drink, sat down across from me and took a thoughtful pull at his own. It was good Scotch. Then he looked to see if the kids were within earshot, and said: "The thing is this, Mr. Gunnarsen. If I could, I would kill every Arcturan alive, and if it meant I had to accept the death of a few million Earthmen to do it, that wouldn't be too high a price. I don't want the base here because I don't want anything to do with those murdering animals."

"Well, you're candid," I said; finished my drink, and added,

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"If you meant that invitation to dinner, I believe I will take you up on it."

I must say they were a nice family. I've worked elections before: Connick was a good candidate because he was a good man. The way his kids behaved around him proved it; and the way he behaved around me was the clincher. I didn't scare him a bit.

Of course, that was not altogether bad, from my point of view.

Connick kept the conversation off Topic A during dinner, which was all right with me, but as soon as it was over and we were alone he said, "All right. You can make your pitch now, Mr. Gunnarsen. Although I don't know why you're here instead of with Tom Schlitz."

Schlitz was the man he was running against. I said, "You don't know this business, I guess. What do we need him for? He's already committed on our side."

"And I'm already committed against you, but I guess that's what you're hoping to change. Well, what's your offer?"

He was moving too fast for me. I pretended to misunderstand. "Really, Mr. Connick, I wouldn't insult you by offering a bribe—"

"No, I know you wouldn't. Because you're smart enough to know I wouldn't take money. So it isn't money. What is it, then? Moultrie & Bigelow working for me instead of Schlitz in the election? That's a pretty good offer, but the price is too high. I won't pay it."

"Well," I said, "as a matter of fact, we would be willing—"

"Yes, I thought so. No deal. Anyway, do you really think I need help to get elected?"

That was a good point, I was forced to admit. I conceded, "No, not if everything else was equal. You're way ahead right now, as your surveys and ours both show. But everything else isn't equal."

"By which you mean that you're going to help old Slits-and-fits. All right, that makes it a horse race."

I held up my glass and he refilled it. I said, "Mr. Connick, I told you once you didn't know this business. You don't. It isn't a horse race because you can't win against us."

"I can sure give it the hell of a try, though. Anyway—" he finished his own drink thoughtfully —"you brainwashers are a little bit fat, I think. Everybody knows how powerful you are, and you haven't really had to show it much lately. I wonder if the emperor's really running around naked."

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"Oh, no, Mr. Connick. Best dressed emperor you ever saw, take my word for it."

He said, frowning a little bit, "I think I'll have to find out for myself. Anyway, frankly, I think people's minds are made up and you can't change them."

"We don't have to," I said. "Don't you know why people vote the way they do, Connick? They don't vote their 'minds'. They vote attitudes and they vote impulses. Frankly, I'd rather work on your side than against you. Schlitz would be easy to beat. He's Jewish."

Connick said angrily, "There's none of that in Belport, man."

"Of anti-semitism, you mean. Of course not. But if one candidate is Jewish, and if it turns up that fifteen years ago he tried to square a parking ticket—and there's always something that turns up, Connick, believe me—then they'll vote against him for fixing parking tickets. That's what I mean by 'attitudes'. Your voter—oh, not all of them; but enough to swing any election—goes into the booth pulled this way and that. We don't have to change his mind. We just have to help him decide which part of it to operate on." I let him refill my glass, and took a pull at it. I was aware that I was beginning to feel the effects. "Take you, Connick," I said. "Suppose you're a Democrat and you go in to cast your vote. We know how you're going to vote for president, right? You're going to vote for the Democratic candidate."

Connick said, not unbending much, "Not necessarily. But probably."

"Not necessarily, right. And why not necessarily? Because maybe you know this fellow who's running on the Democratic ticket—or maybe somebody you know has a grudge against him, couldn't get the postmaster's job he wanted, or ran against his delegates for the convention. Point is, you have something *against* him just because your first instinct is for him. So how do you vote? Whichever way happens to get dominance *at the moment of voting*. Not at any other moment. Not as a matter of principle. But right then. No, we don't have to change any minds . . . because most people don't have enough mind to change!"

He stood up and absent-mindedly filled his own glass—I wasn't the only one who was beginning to feel the liquor. "I'd hate to be you," he said, half to himself.

"Oh, it's not bad."

He shook his head, then recollected himself and said,

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"Well, thanks for the lesson. I didn't know. But I'll tell you one thing you'll never do. You'll never get me to vote on the Arcturan side on *any* question."

I sneered, "There's an open mind for you! Leader of the people! Takes an objective look at every question!"

"All right, I'm not objective. They stink."

"Race prejudice, Connick?"

"Oh, don't be a fool."

"There is," I said, "an Arcturan aroma. They can't help it."

"I didn't say 'smell'. I said 'stink'. I don't want them in this town and neither does anybody else. Not even Schlitz."

"You don't have to ever see them. They don't like Earth climate, you know. Too hot for them. Too much air. Why, Connick," I said, "I'll bet you a hundred bucks you won't set eyes on an Arcturan for at least a year, not until the base is built and staffed. And then I doubt they'll bother to—What's the matter?"

He was looking at me as though I were an idiot, and I almost began to think I was.

"Why," he said, again in that tone that was more to himself than to me, "I guess I've been overrating you. You think you're God, so I've been accepting your own valuation."

"What do you mean?"

"Inexcusably bad staff work, Mr. Gunnarsen," he said, nodding judgematically. "It ought to make me feel good. But you know, it doesn't. It scares me. With the kind of power you throw around, you should always be right."

"Spit it out!"

"It's just that you lose your bet. Didn't you know there's an Arcturan in town right now?"

III

When I got back to the car the phone was buzzing and the "Message Recorded" light blinked at me. The message was from Candace:

"Gunner, a Truce Team has checked into the Statler-Bills to supervise the election and get this. One of them's an Arcturan!"

The staff work wasn't so bad, after all, just unpardonably slow. But there wasn't much comfort in that.

I called the hotel and was connected with one of the Truce Team staff—the best the hotel would do for me. The staff man was a colonel who said, "Yes, Mr. Knafti is aware of your work here and specifically does not wish to see you. This is a Truce Team, Mr. Gunnarsen. Do you know what that means, exactly?"

And he hung up on me. Well,

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I did know what it meant—strictly hands-off, all the way—I simply hadn't known that they would interpret it that rigidly.

It was a kick in the eye, any way I looked at it. Because it made me look like a fool in front of Connick, when I kind of wanted him scared of me. Because Arcturans do, after all, stink—not good public relations at all, when your product smells like well-rotted garlic buds a few hundred feet away. I didn't want the voters smelling them.

And most of all because of the interference that I was sure any red-blooded, stubborn-minded, confused voter would draw. Jeez, Sam, you hear about that Arcturan coming to spy on us? Yeah, Charley, the damn bugs are practically accusing us of rigging the election. Damn right, Sam, and you know what else? They stink, Sam.

Half an hour later I got a direct call from Haber. "Gunner, boy! Good God! Oh, this is the reeking end!"

I said, "It sounds to me like you've found out about the Arcturan on the Truce Team."

"You know? And you didn't tell *me*?"

Well, I had been about to ream him for not telling *me*, but obviously that wasn't going to do any good. I tried anyway, but he fell back on his fat ignorance. "They didn't clue me in from Chicago. Can I help that? Be fair now, Gunner, boy!"

Gunner boy very fairly hung up.

I was beginning to feel very sleepy. For a moment I debated taking a brisk-up pill, but the mild buzz Connick's liquor had left with me was pleasant enough, and besides it was getting late. I went to the hotel Candace had reserved for me and crawled into bed.

It only took me a few minutes to fall asleep, but I was faintly aware of an odor. It was the same hotel the Truce Team was staying at.

I couldn't really be smelling this Arcturan, Knafti. It was just my imagination. That's what I told myself as I dialed for sleep and drifted off.

The pillow-phone hummed and Candace's voice said out of it, "Wake up and get decent, Gunner, I'm coming up."

I managed to sit up, shook my head and took a few whiffs of amphetamide. As always, it woke me right up, but at the usual price of feeling that I hadn't had quite enough sleep. Still, I got into a robe and was in the bathroom fixing breakfast when she knocked on the door. "It's open," I called. "Want some coffee?"

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"Sure Gunner." She came and stood in the doorway, watching me turn the Hilsch squirt to full boil and fill two cups. I spooned dry coffee into them and turned the squirt to cold. "Orange juice?" She took the coffee and shook her head, so I just mixed one glass, swallowed it down, tossed the glass in the disposal hamper and took the coffee into the other room. The bed had stripped itself already: it was now a couch, and I leaned back on it, drinking my coffee. "All right, honey," I said, "What's the dirt on Connick?"

She hesitated, then opened her bag and took out a photofax and handed it to me. It was a reproduction of an old steel-engraving headed, in antique script, *The Army of the United States,* and it said,

> Be it known to all men that
> DANIEL T. CONNICK
> ASIN Ai-32880515
> has this date been separated from the service of the United States for the convenience of the government; and
> Be it further known to all men that the conditions of his discharge are
> DISHONORABLE

"Well, what do you know," I said. "You see, honey? There's always something."

Candace finished her coffee, set the cup down neatly on a windowsill and took out a cigarette. That was like her: she always did one thing at a time, an orderly sort of mind that I couldn't match—and couldn't stand, either. Undoubtedly she knew what I was thinking because undoubtedly she was thinking it too; but there wasn't any nostalgia in her voice when she said: "You went and saw him last night, didn't you? . . . And you're still going to knife him?"

I said, "I'm going to see that he is defeated in the election, yes. That's what they pay me for. Me and some others."

"No, Gunner," she said, "that's not what M&B pay *me* for, if that's what you mean, because there isn't that much money."

"I got up and went over beside her. "More coffee? No? Well, I guess I don't want any either. Honey—"

Candace stood up and crossed the room, sitting in a straight-backed chair. "You wake up all of a sudden, don't you? Don't change the subject. We were talking about—"

"We were talking," I told her, "about a job that we're paid to do. All right, you've done one part of it for me, you got me what I wanted on Connick."

I stopped, because she was shaking her head. "I'm not so sure I did."

"How's that?"

"Well, it's not on the fax, but I know why he got his DD. 'Desertion of hazardous duty.' On

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the Moon, in the U.N. Space Force. The year was 1998."

I nodded, because I understood what she was talking about. Connick wasn't the only one. Half the Space Force had cracked up that year. November. A heavy Leonid strike of meteorites and a solar flare at the same time. The Space Force top brass had decided they had to crack down and asked the U.S. Army to court-martial every soldier who cut and ran for an underground shelter, and the Army had felt obliged to comply. "But most of them got presidential clemency," I said. "He didn't?"

Candace shook her head. "He didn't apply."

"Um. Well, it's still on record." I dismissed the subject. "Something else. What about these Children?"

Candace put out her cigarette and stood up. "Why I'm here, Gunner. It was on your list. So —get dressed."

"For what?"

She grinned. "For my peace of mind, for one thing. Also for investigating the Children, like you say. I've made you an appointment at the hospital in fifty-five minutes."

You have to remember that I didn't know anything about the Children except rumors. Bless Haber, he hadn't thought it necessary to explain. And Candace only said, "Wait till we get to the hospital. You'll see for yourself."

Donnegan General was seven stories of cream-colored ceramic brick, air-controlled, wall-lighted throughout, tiny asepsis lamps sparkling blue where the ventilation ducts opened. Candace parked the car in an underground garage and led me to an elevator, then to a waiting room. She seemed to know her way around very well. She glanced at her watch, told me we were a couple of minutes early and pointed to a routing map that was a mural with colored lights showing visitors the way to whatever might be their destination. It also showed, quite impressively, the size and scope of Donnegan General. The hospital had twenty-two fully equipped operating rooms, a specimen and transplant bank, X-ray and radiochemical departments, a cryogenics room, the most complete prosthesis installation on Earth, a geriatrics section, O.T. rooms beyond number . . .

And, of all things, a fully equipped and crowded pediatric wing.

I said, "I thought this was a V.A. facility."

"Exactly. Here comes our boy."

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A Navy officer was coming in, hand and smile outstretched to Candace. "Hi, good to see you. And you must be Mr. Gunnarsen."

Candace introduced us as we shook hands. The fellow's name was Commander Whitling; she called him "Tom". He said, "We'll have to move. Since I talked to you there's been an all-hands evolution scheduled for eleven—some high brass inspection. I don't want to hurry you, but I'd like it if we were out of the way . . . this is a little irregular."

"Nice of you to arrange it," I said. "Lead on."

We went up a high-rise elevator and came out on the top floor of the building, into a corridor covered with murals of Disney and Mother Goose. From a sun deck came the tinkle of a music box. Three children, chasing each other down the hall, dodged past us, yelling. They made pretty good time, considering that two of them were on crutches. "What the hell are you doing here?" asked Commander Whitling sharply.

I looked twice, but he wasn't talking to me or the kids. He was talking to a man with a young face but a heavy black beard, who was standing behind a Donald Duck mobile looking inconspicuous and guilty.

"Oh, hi, Mr. Whitling," the man said. "Jeez. I must've got lost again looking for the PX."

"Carhart," said the commander dangerously, "if I catch you in this wing again you won't have to worry about the PX for a year. Hear me?"

"Well, jeez. All right, Mr. Whitling." As the man saluted and turned, his face wearing an expression of injury, I noticed that the left sleeve of his bathrobe was tucked, empty, into a pocket.

"You can't keep them out," said Whitling and spread his hands. "Well, all right, Mr. Gunnarsen, here it is. You're seeing the whole thing."

I looked carefully around. It was all children—limping children, stumbling children, pale children, weary children. "But what am I seeing, exactly?" I asked.

"Why, the Children, Mr. Gunnarsen. The ones we liberated. The ones the Arcturans captured on Mars."

And then I connected. I remembered about the capture of the colony on Mars.

Interstellar war is waged at the pace of a snail's crawl, because it takes so long to go from star to star. The main battles of our war with Arcturus had been fought no farther from Earth

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than the surface of Mars and the fleet engagement around Orbit Saturn. Still, it had taken eleven years, first to last, from the surprise attack on the Martian colony to the armistice signed at Washington.

I remembered seeing a reconstructed tape of that Martian surprise attack. It was a summer's day—hot—at full noon, ice melted into water. The place was the colony around the Southern Springs. Out of the small descending sun a ship appeared.

It was a rocket. It was brilliant gold metal, and it came down with a halo of gold radiation around its splayed front, like the fleshy protuberance of a star-nosed mole. It landed with an electrical crackle on the fine-grained orange sand, and out of it came the Arcturans.

Of course, no one had known they were Arcturans then. They had swung around the sun in a long anecliptic orbit, watching and studying, and they had selected the small Martian outpost as the place to strike. In Mars gravity they were bipeds—two of their ropy limbs were enough to lift them off the ground—man tall, in golden pressure suits. The colonists came running out to meet them, and were killed. All of them. All of the adults.

The children, however, had not been killed, not that quickly or that easily, at least. Some had not been killed at all, and some of those were here in Donnegan General Hospital.

But not all.

Comprehension beginning to emerge in my small mind I said, "Then these are the survivors."

Candace, standing very close to me, said, "Most of them, Gunner. The ones that aren't well enough to be sent back into normal life."

"And the others?"

"Well, they mostly don't have families—having been killed, you see. So they've been adopted out into foster-homes here in Belport. A hundred and eight of them, isn't that right, Tom? And now maybe you get some idea of what you're up against."

There was something like a hundred of the Children in that wing, and I didn't see all of them. Some of them were not to be seen.

Whitling just told me about, but couldn't show me, the blood-temperature room, where the very young and very bad cases lived. They had a gnotobiotic atmosphere, a little rich in oxygen, a little more humid than the ambient air, plus pressure to help their weak metabolism keep oxygen spread in their parts. On their right, a little farther along, were the small individual rooms

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belonging to the worst cases of all. The contagious. The incurables. The unfortunates whose very appearance was bad for the others. Whitling was good enough to open polarizing shutters and let me look in on some of those where they lay (or writhed, or stood like sticks) in permanent solitary. One of the Arcturan efforts had been transplantation, and the project seemed to have been directed by a whimsical person. The youngest was about three; the oldest in late teens.

They were a disturbing lot, and if I have glossed lightly over what I felt, it is because what I felt is all too obvious.

Kids in trouble! Of course, those who had been put back into population weren't put back shocking as these. But they would pull at the heartstrings, they even pulled at mine; and every time a foster-parent, or a foster-parent's neighbor, or a casual passer-by on the street, felt that heartstring tug he would feel, too, a single thought: *The Arcturans did this.*

For after killing the potentially dangerous adults they had caged the tractable small ones as valuable research specimens.

And I had hoped to counteract this with five hundred Arcturan pets!

Whitling was all this time taking me around the wing, and I could hear in his voice the sound of what I was up against; because he loved and pitied those kids. "Hi, Terry," he said on the sun-deck, bending over a bed and patting its occupant on his snow-white hair. Terry smiled up at him. "Can't hear us, of course," said Whitling. "We grafted in new auditory nerves four weeks ago—I did it myself—but they're not surviving. Third try, too. And of course, each attempt is a worse risk than the one before: antibodies."

I said, "He doesn't look more than five years old." Whitling nodded. "But the attack on the colony was—"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Whitling. "The Arcturans were, of course, interested in reproduction too. Ellen—she left us a couple of weeks ago — was only thirteen, but she'd had six children. Now, this is Nancy."

Nancy was perhaps twelve, but her gait and arm coordination were those of a toddler. She came stumbling in after a ball, stopped and regarded me with dislike and suspicion. "Nancy's one of our cures," Whitling said proudly. He followed my eyes. "Oh, nothing wrong there," he said. "Mars-bred. She hasn't adjusted to Earth gravity, is all; she isn't slow, the ball's bouncing too fast. Here's Sam."

Sam was a near-teen-ager, gig-

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gling from his bed as he tried what was obviously the extremely wearing exercise of lifting his head off the mattress. A candy-striped practical nurse was counting time for him as he touched chin to chest, one and two, one and two. He did it five times, then slumped back, grinning. "Sam's central nervous system was almost gone," Whitling said fondly. "But we're making progress. Nervous tissue regeneration, though, is awfully—" I wasn't listening; I was looking at Sam's grin, which showed black and broken teeth. "Diet deficiency," said Whitling, following my look again.

"All right," I said, "I've seen enough, now I want to get out of here before they have me changing diapers. I thank you, Commander Whitling. I think I thank you. Which way is out?"

IV

I didn't want to go back to Haber's office. I was afraid of what the conversation might be like. But I had to get a fill-in on what had been happening with our work and I had to eat.

So I took Candace back to my room and ordered lunch from room service.

I stood at the thermal window looking out at the city while Candace checked with the office. I didn't even listen, because Candace knew what I would want to know, I just watched Belport cycle through an average dull Monday at my feet. Belport was a radial town, with an urban center-cluster of the mushroom-shaped buildings that were popular twenty years ago. The hotel we were in was one, in fact, and from my window I could see three others looming above and below me, to right and left, and beyond them the cathedral spires of the apartment condominia of the residential districts. I could see a creeping serpent of gaily colored cars moving along one of the trafficways, pinpointed with sparks of our pro-referendum campaign parades. Or one of the opposition's. From four hundred feet it didn't seem to matter.

"You know, honey," I said as she clicked off the 3-V, "there isn't any sense to this. I admit the kids are sad cases, and who can resist kids in trouble? But they don't have one solitary damned thing to do with whether or not the Arcturans should have a telemetry and tracking station out on the lake."

Candace said, "Weren't you the man who told me that logic didn't have anything to do with public relations?" She came to the window beside me, turned and half-sat on the ledge and

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read from her notes: "Survey index off another half-point . . . Haber says, be sure to tell you that's a victory, would have have been off two points at least without the Arcats. Supplier letters out. Chicago approves budget overdraft. And that's all that matters."

"Thanks." The door chimed, and she left me to let the bellmen in with our lunch. I watched her without much appetite, except maybe for the one thing that I knew wasn't on the menu, Candace herself. But I tried to eat.

Candace did not seem to be trying to help me eat. In fact, she did something that was quite out of character for her. All the way through lunch she kept talking, and the one subject she kept talking about was the kids. I heard about Nina, who was fifteen when she came to Donnegan General and had been through the occupation all the way—who wouldn't talk to anybody, and weighed fifty-one pounds, and screamed unless she was allowed to hide under the bed. "And after six months," said Candace, "they gave her a hand-puppet, and she finally talked through *that*."

"How'd you find all this out?" I asked.

"From Tom. And then there were the germ-free kids . . ." She told me about them, and about the series of injections and marrow transplants that they had needed to restore the body's immune reaction without killing the patient. And the ones with auditory and vocal nerves destroyed, apparently because the Arcturans were investigating the question of whether humans could think rationally in the absence of articulate words. The ones raised on chemically pure glucose for dietary studies. The induced bleeders. The kids with no sense of touch, and the kids with no developed musculature.

"Tom told you all this?"

"And lots more, Gunner. And remember, these are the survivors. Some of the kids who were deliberately—"

"How long have you known Tom?"

She put down her fork, sugared her coffee and took a sip, looking at me over the cup. "Oh, since I've been here. Two years. Since before the kids came, of course."

"Pretty well, I judge."

"Oh, yes."

"He really likes those kids, I could see that. And so do you." I swallowed some more of my own coffee, which tasted like diluted pig swill, and reached for a cigarette and said, "I think maybe I waited too long about the situation here, wouldn't you say?"

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"Why, yes, Gunner," she said carefully, "I think you maybe missed the boat."

"I tell you what else I think, honey. I think you're trying to tell me something, and it isn't all about Proposition Four on the ballot next week."

And she said, not irrelevantly, "As a matter of fact, Gunner, I'm going to marry Tom Whitling on Christmas day."

I sent her back to the office and stretched out on my bed, smoking and watching the smoke being sucked into the wall-vents. It was rather peaceful and quiet because I'd told the desk to hold all calls until further notice, and I wasn't feeling a thing.

Perfection is so rare, it is interesting to find a case in which one has been perfectly wrong all the way.

If I had taken out my little list then I could have checked off all the points. One way or another. I hadn't fired Haber, and in fact I really didn't want to any more, because he wasn't much worse than I was at this particular job; the record showed it. I had investigated the Children, all right. A little late. I had investigated Connick, the number one opponent to the proposition, and what I had found would hurt Connick, all right, but I couldn't really see how it would help do our job. And I certainly wasn't going to marry Candace Harmon.

Come to think of it, I thought, lighting another cigarette from the stub of the old one, there had been a fifth item, and I had blown that one too.

The classics of public relations clearly show how little reason has to do with M/R, and yet I had allowed myself to fall into that oldest and most imbecilic of traps set for flacks. Think of history's masterstrokes of flackery: "The Jews stabbed Germany in the back!" "Seventy-eight (or fifty-nine, or one hundred and three) card-carrying communists in the State Department!" "I will go to Korea!" It is not enough for a theme to be rational; indeed it is *wrong* for a theme to be rational, if you want to move men's glands, because, above all else, it must seem new, and fresh, and of such revolutionary simplicity that it illuminates an enormous, confused and disagreeable problem in a fresh and hopeful light. Or so it must seem to the Average Man. And since he has spent any number of surly, worried hours groping for some personal salvation in the face of a bankrupt Germany, or a threat of subversion, or a war that is going nowhere, no *rational* solution can ever meet those strictures . . . since he has

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already considered all the rational solutions and found either that they are useless or that the cost is more than he wants to pay.

So what I should have concentrated on in Belport was the bright, irrational, distractive issue. The Big Lie, if you will. And I had hardly found even a Sly Insinuation.

It was interesting to consider in just how many ways I had done the wrong thing. Including maybe the wrongest of all: I had let Candace Harmon get away. And then in these thoughts, myself almost despising, haply the door chimed and I opened it, and there was this fellow in Space Force olive-greens saying, "Come along, Mr. Gunnarsen, the Truce Team want to talk to you."

For one frozen moment there, I was nineteen years old again. I was a Rocketman 3/c on the Moon, guarding the Aristarchus base against invaders from outer space. (We thought that to be a big joke at the time. Shows how unfunny a joke can turn.) This fellow was a colonel, and his name was Peyroles, and he took me down the corridor, to a private elevator I had never known was there, up to the flat dome of the mushroom and into a suite which made my suite look like the cellar under a dog-run in Old Levittown. The reek was overpowering. By then I had gotten over my quick response to the brass and I took out a ker-pak and held it to my nose. The colonel did not even look at me.

"Sit down!" barked the colonel, and left me in front of an unlighted fireplace. Something was going on; I could hear voices from another room, a lot of them:

"— burned one in effigy, and by God we'll burn a real one —"

"— smells like a skunk —"

"— turns my stomach!" And that last fellow, whoever he was, was pretty near right, at that — although actually in the few seconds since I entered the suite I had almost forgotten the smell. It was funny how you got used to it. Like a ripe cheese: The first whiff knocked you sick, but pretty soon the olfactory nerves got the hang of the thing and built up a defense.

"— all right, the war's over and we have to get along with them, but a man's home town —"

Whatever it was that was going on in the other room, it was going on loudly. Tempers were always short when Arcturans were around, because the smell, of course, put everybody on edge. People don't like bad smells. They're not nice. They remind us of sweat and excrement, which

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we have buttressed our lives against admitting as real, personal facts. Then there was a loud military yell for order — I recognized the colonel, Peyroles — and then a voice that sounded queerly not-quite-human, although it spoke in English. An Arcturan? What was his name, Knafti? But I had understood they couldn't make human sounds.

Whoever it was, he put an end to the meeting. The door opened.

Through it I could see a couple of dozen hostile backs, leaving through another door, and coming toward me the Space Force colonel, a very young man with a pale, angel's face and a dragging limp, in civilian clothes . . . and, yes, and the Arcturan. It was the first one I had ever been with at so close range, in so small a group. He wobbled toward me on four or six of his coat-hanger limbs, breathing-thorax encased in a golden shell, his mantis face and bright black eyes staring at me.

Peyroles closed the door behind them.

He turned to me and said, "Mr. Gunnarsen . . . Knafti . . . Timmy Brown."

I hadn't the ghost of a clue whether to offer to shake, and if so, with what. Knafti however merely regarded me gravely. The boy nodded. I said: "I'm glad to meet you, gentlemen. As you perhaps know, I tried to set up an appointment before but your people turned me down. I take it now the shoe is on the other foot."

Colonel Peyroles frowned toward the door he had just shut — there were still noises behind it — but said to me, "You're quite right. That was a meeting of a civic leaders' committee —"

The door interrupted him by opening, and a man leaned through and yelled: "Peyroles! Can that thing understand white man's talk? I hope so. I hope it hears me when I say that I'm going to make it my personal business to take it apart if it's still in Belport this time tomorrow. And if any human being, or so-called human being like you, gets in the way, I'll take him apart too!" He slammed the door without waiting for an answer.

"You see?" said Peyroles gruffly, angrily. Things like that would never have happened with well-tempered troops. "That's what we want to talk to you about."

"I see," I said, and I did see, very clearly, because that fellow who had leaned through the door had been the Arcturan-property-sale standard bearer we had counted on, old — what had Connick called him? — old Slits-and-Fits Schlitz, the man we

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were attempting to elect to get our proposition through.

Judging by the amount of noise I'd heard from the citizens' delegation, there was lynch in the atmosphere. I could understand why they would reverse themselves and ask for me, before things got totally out of control and wound up in murder, if you call killing an Arcturan murder —

— although, it occurred to me, lynching Knafti might not be the worst thing that could happen; public sentiment might bounce back —

I shoved that thought out of my mind and got down to business. "What, exactly?" I asked. "I gather you want me to do something about your image."

Knafti sat himself down, if that's what Arcturans do, on an entwining-rack. The pale boy whispered something to him, then came to me. "Mr. Gunnar*sen*," he said, "I am Knaf*ti*." He spoke with a great precision of vowels and a stress at the end of each sentence, as though he had learned English out of a handbook. I had no trouble in understanding him. At least, not in understanding what it was he said. It did take me a moment to comprehend what he meant; and then Peyroles had to help.

"He means at this moment he's speaking for Knafti," said the colonel. "Interpreter. See?"

The boy moved his lips for a moment—shifting gears, it seemed — and said, "That is right, I am Timmy *Brown*. *Knafti*'s translator and assis*tant*."

"Then ask Knafti what he wants from me." I tried to say it the way he had — a sort of sneeze for the "K" and an indescribable whistle for the "F."

Timmy Brown moved his lips again and said, "I, Knafti, wish you to stop . . . to leave . . . to discontinue your operation in Bel*port*."

From the twining-tree, the Arcturan waved his ropy limbs and chittered like a squirrel. The boy chirped back and said: "I, Knafti, commend you on your effective work, but stop *it*."

"By which," rumbled Colonel Peyroles, "he means knock it off."

"Go fight a space war, Peyroles. Timmy — I mean, Knafti, this is the job I'm paid to do. The Arcturan Confederacy itself hired us. I take my orders from Arthur S. Bigelow, Jr., and I carry them out whether Knafti likes it or not."

Chirp and chitter between Knafti and the pale, limping boy. The Arcturan left his twining-tree and moved to the window, looking out into the sky and the copter traffic. Timmy Brown

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said: "It does not matter what your orders may be, I, Knafti, tell you that your work is harmful." He hesitated, mumbling to himself. "We do not wish to obtain our base here at the cost of what is true, and —" he turned imploringly to the Arcturan — "and it is apparent you are attempting to change the *truth*."

He chirped at the Arcturan, who took his blind black eyes from the window and came toward us. Arcturans don't walk, exactly. They drag themselves on the lower part of the thorax. Their limbs are supple and thin, and what are not used for support are used for gestures. Knafti used a number of his now, as he chirped one short series of sounds at the boy.

"— Otherwise," Timmy Brown finished off, "I, Knafti, tell you we will have to fight this war over *again*."

As soon as I was back in my room I messaged Chicago for orders and clarification and got back the answer I expected: *Hold everything. Referring matter to ASB-jr. Await instructions.*

So I awaited. The way I awaited was to call Candace at the office and get the latest sitrep. I told her about the near-riot in the Truce Team's suite and asked her what it was all about. She shook her head. "We have their appointments schedule, Gunner. It just says 'Meeting with civic leaders.' But one of the leaders has a secretary who goes to lunch with a girl from Records & Accounting here and —"

"And you'll find out. All right, do that, and now what's the current picture?"

She began reading off briefing digests and field reports. They were mixed, but not altogether bad. Opinion sampling showed a small rise in favorability toward the Arcturans, in fact. It wasn't much, but it was the first plus change I had seen, and doubly puzzling because of Knafti's attitude and the brawl with the civic leaders. I asked,

"Why, honey?"

Candace's face in the screen was as puzzled as mine. "We're still digging."

"All right. Go on."

There were more pluses. The Flower Fair had yielded surprisingly big profits in attitudes — among those who attended. Of course, they were only a tiny fraction of the population of Belport. The Arcats were showing a plus for us, too. Where we were down was in PTA meeting resolutions, in resignations from Candace's Arcturan-American Friendship League, in poor attendance at neighborhood coffee-klatsches.

Now that I knew what to look

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for, I could see what the Children had done to us. In every family-situation sampling, the attitudes were measurably worse than when the subjects were interviewed in a non-family environment — at work, stopped on the street, in a theater.

The importance of that was just what I had told Connick. No man is a simple entity. He behaves one way when his self-image is as head of a family, another when he is at a cocktail party, another at work, another still when a pretty girl sits down beside him on a commuter-copter. Elementary truths. But it had taken the M/R boys half a century to learn how to use them.

In this case the use was clear: Play down family elements, play up play. I ordered more floats, torchlight parades and a teen-age beauty contest. I canceled the fourteen picnic rallies we had planned and ordered a hold on the coffee-klatsches.

I was not exactly obeying Chicago's orders. But it didn't matter. All this could be canceled with a single word, and anyway it was only nit-picking detail. The One Big Weeny still escaped me.

I lit a cigarette, thought for a minute and said, "Honey get me some of the synoptic extracts of opinion-sampling from heads of families and particularly families containing some of the Children. I don't want the integration or anaylsis. Just the raw interviews but with the scutwork left out."

And as soon as she was off the line the Chicago circuit came in with a message they'd been holding:

Query from ASB-jr. Provided top is taken off budget and your hand is freed, can you guarantee, repeat guarantee, win on referendum question?

It was not the response I had expected from them.

Still, it was a legitimate question. I took a moment to think it over.

Junior Bigelow had already given me a pretty free hand — as he always did; how else can a troubleshooter work? If he was now emphasizing that my hand was freed entirely, it would not be because he thought I hadn't understood him in the first place. Nor would it be because he suspected I might be cheese-paring secretarial salaries. He meant one thing: Win, no matter what.

Under those conditions, could I do it?

Well, of course I could win. Yes. Provided I found the One Big Weeny. You can always win an election, any election anywhere, provided you are willing to pay the right price.

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It was finding the price to pay that was hard. Not just money. Sometimes the price you pay is a human being, in the role for which I had been lining up Connick. Throw a human sacrifice to the gods and your prayer is granted . . .

But was Connick the sacrifice the gods wanted? Would it help to defeat him, bearing in mind that his opponent was one of the men who had been screaming at Knafti in the Truce Team suite? And if so — had my knife enough edge to drain his blood?

Well, it always had had before. And if Connick wasn't the right man, I would find the man who was. I messaged back, short and sweet, *Yes.*

And in less than a minute, as though Junior had been standing by at the faxtape receiver, waiting for the word from me — and perhaps he had! — his reply came back:

Gunner, we've lost the Arcturan Confederacy account. Arc Con liaison man says all bets off. They're giving notice of cancellation our contract, suggestion they will cancel entire armistice treaty too. I don't have to tell you we need them. Some possibility that showing strong results in Belport will get them back. That's what we have to play for. No holds barred, Gunner, win that election.

The office circuit chimed then. Probably it was Candace, but I didn't want to talk to her just then. I turned all the communication circuits to "hold", stripped down, climbed into the shower, set it for full needle spray and let the water beat on me. It was not an aid to thought, it was a replacement for thought.

I didn't want to think any more. I wanted time out.

I did not want to think about (a) whether the war would break out again, and, if so, in what degree I would have helped to bring that about; (b) what I was doing to Nice Guy Connick; (c) whether It Was All Worth It or (d) how much I was going to dislike myself that coming Christmas day. I only wanted to let the hot splash of scented foaming water anesthetize me. When my skin began to look pale and wrinkly, although I had not come to any conclusions or found any solutions, I came out, dressed, opened the communications circuits and let them all begin blinking, ringing and winking at once.

I took Candace first. She said, "Gunner! Dear lord, have you heard about the Armistice Commission? They've just released a statement —"

"I heard. What else, honey?"

Good girl, she shifted gears

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without missing a beat. "Then there was that meeting of civic leaders in the Truce Team suite —"

"I saw. Feedback from the Armistice Commission's statement. What else?"

She glanced at the papers in her hand, hesitated, then said: "Nothing important. Uh, Gunner. That 3-V preempt for tonight —"

"Yeah, honey?"

"Do you want me to cancel it?"

I said, "No. You're right, we won't use the time for the Arcturan-American Friendship League or whatever we had scheduled, but you're wrong, we'll use the time some way. I don't know how right now."

"But Junior said —"

"Honey," I told her, "Junior says all sorts of things. Anybody looking to scalp me?"

"Well," she said, "There's Mr. Connick. I didn't think you'd want to see him."

"No, I'll see him. I'll see anybody."

"Anybody?" I had surprised her. She dived into her list again. "There's somebody from the Truce Team —"

"Make it everybody from the Truce Team."

"— and Commander Whitling from —"

"From the hospital. Sure, and tell him to bring some kids."

"— and . . ." She trailed off and looked at me. "Gunner, are you putting me on? You don't really want to see all these people."

I smiled and reached out and patted the viewphone. From her point of view it would look like an enormous cloudy hand closing in on her screen, but she would know what I meant. I said, "You could not be more wrong. I do. I want to see them all, the more the better, and the way I'd like to see them best is in my office, all at once. So set it up, honey, because I'll be busy between now and then."

"Busy doing what, Gunner?"

"Busy trying to think of what I want to see them for." And I turned off the viewphone, got up and walked out, leaving the others gobbling into emptiness behind me. What I needed was a long, long walk, and I took it.

When I was tired of walking I went to the office and evicted Haber from his private quarters. I kept him standing by what had once been his own desk while I checked with Candace and found that she had made all my appointments for that evening, then I told him to get lost. "And thanks," I said.

He paused on his way to the door. "For what, Gunner?"

"For a very nice office to kill

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time in." I waved at the furnishings. "I wondered what you'd spent fifty grand on when I saw the invoices in the Chicago office, Haber, and I admit I thought there might have been a little padding. But I was wrong."

He said woundedly: "Gunner, boy! I wouldn't do anything like that."

"I believe you. Wait a minute." I thought for a second, then told him to send in some of the technical people and not to let anybody, repeat anybody, disturb me for any purpose whatever. I scared him good, too. He left a shaken man, a little angry, a little admiring, a little excited inside, I think, at the prospect of seeing how the great man would get himself out of this one. Meanwhile the great man talked briefly to the technicians, took a ten-minute nap, drank the Martinis out of his dinner tray and pitched the rest of it in the dispos-all.

Then, as I had nearly an hour before the appointments Candace had set up for me, I scrounged around fat-cat Haber's office to see what entertainment it offered.

There were his files. I glanced at them and forgot them; there was nothing about the hoarded memoranda that interested me, not even for gossip. There were the books on his shelf. But I did not care to disturb the patina of dust that even the cleaning machines had not been able to touch. There was his private bar, and the collection of photographs in the end compartment of his desk drawer.

It looked like very dull times waiting, until the studio men reported in that they had completed their arrangements at my request, and the 3-V tape-effects monitor could now be controlled by remote from my desk; and then I knew I had a pleasant way of killing any amount of time.

Have you ever played with the console of a 3-V monitor, backed by a library of tape-effects strips? It is very much like being God.

All that the machine does is take the stored videotapes that are in its files and play them back. But it also manipulates size and perspective or superimposes one over another . . . so that you can, as I in fact have done, put the living person of someone you don't like in a position embarrassing to him, and project it on a montage screen so that only a studio tech can find the dots on the pattern where the override betrays its presence.

Obviously, this is a way out of almost any propaganda difficulty, since it is child's play to make up any event you like and give it the seeming of reality.

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Of course, everybody knows it can be done. So the evidence of one's own eyes is not longer quite enough, even for a voter. And the laws can cut you down. I had thought of whomping up some frightful frame around Connick, for example. But it wouldn't work; no matter when I did it there would still be time for the other side to spread the word of an electoral fraud, and a hoax of this magnitude would make its own way onto the front pages. So I used the machine for something much more interesting to me. I used it as a toy.

I started by dialing the lunar base at Aristarchus for background, found a corps of Rocketman marching off in the long lunar step, patched my own face onto one of the helmeted figures and zoomed in and out with the imaginary camera, watching R3/c Odin Gunnarsen as a boy of nineteen, scared witless but doing his job. He was a pretty nice boy, I thought objectively, and wondered what had gone wrong with him later. I abandoned that and sought for other amusements. I found Candace's images on tape in the files and pleasured myself with her for a time. Her open, friendly face gave some dignity to the fantastic bodies of half a dozen 3-V strippers in the files; but I stopped that child's game.

I looked for a larger scope. I spread the whole panoply of the heavens across the screen of the tape machine. I sought out the crook of the Big Dipper's handle, traced its arc across half the heavens until I located orange Arcturus. Then I zoomed in on the star, as littler stars grew larger and hurtled out of range around it, sought its seven gray-green planets and located number five among them, the watery world that Knafti had spawned upon. I bade the computing mind inside the tape machine reconstruct the events of the orbit bombing for me, and watched hell-bombs splash enormous mushrooms of poisonous foam into the Arcturan sky, whipping the island cities with tidal waves and drowning them in death.

Then I destroyed the whole planet. I turned Arcturan into a nova and watched the hot driven gases sphere out to embrace the planet, boil its seas, slag its cities . . . and found myself sweating. I ordered another drink from the dispenser and switched the machine off. And then I became aware that the pale blue light over the door to Haber's office was glowing insistently. It was time; my visitors had arrived.

Connick had brought his kids along, three of them; the lover from Donnegan General

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had brought two more; Knafti and Colonel Peyroles had Timmy Brown. "Welcome to Romper Room," I said. "They're making lynch mobs young this year."

They all yelled at me at once — or all but Knafti, whose tweeting chitter just didn't have the volume to compete. I listened, and when they showed signs of calming down I reached into fat cat Huber's booze drawer and poured myself a stiff one and said, "All right, which of you creeps want first crack?" And they boiled up again while I drank my drink. All of them, except Candace Harmon, who only stood by the door and looked at me.

So I said, "All right, Connick, you first. Are you going to make me spread it all over the newscasts that you had a dishonorable discharge? . . . And by the way, maybe you'd like to meet my assistant blackmailer; Miss Harmon over there dug up the dirt on you."

Her boy friend yelped, but Candace just went on looking. I didn't look back, but kept my eyes on Connick. He squinted his eyes, put his hands in his pockets and said, with considerable self-restraint, "You know I was only seventeen years old when that happened."

"Oh, sure. I know more. You had a nervous breakdown the year after your discharge, space cafard, as they call it on the soapies. Yellow fever is what we called it on the Moon."

He glanced quickly at his kids, the two that were his own and the one that was not, and said rapidly: "You know I could have had that DD reversed —"

"But you didn't. The significant fact isn't that you deserted. The significant fact is that you were loopy. And, I'd say, still are."

Timmy Brown stuttered: "One moment. I, Knafti, have asked that you cease —"

But Connick brushed him aside. "Why, Gunnarsen?"

"Because I intend to win this election. I don't care what it costs — especially what it costs you."

"But, I, Knafti, have instructed —" That was Timmy Brown trying again.

"The Armistice Commission issued orders —" That was Peyroles.

"I don't know which is worse, you or the bugs!" And that was Candace's little friend from the hospital, and they all were talking at once again. Even Knafti came dragging toward me on his golden slug's belly, chirruping and hooting, and Timmy Brown was actually weeping as he tried to tell me I was wrong, I had to stop, the whole thing was against

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orders and why wouldn't I de*sist?*

I shouted: "Shut up, all of you!"

They didn't, but the volume level dropped minutely. I rode over it: "What the hell do I care what any of you want? I'm paid to do a job. My job is to make people act a certain way. I do it. Maybe tomorrow I'll be paid to make them act the opposite way, and I'll do that, too. Anyway, who the hell are you to order me around? A stink-bug like you, Knafti? A GI quack like yourself, Whitling? Or you, Connick. A —"

"A candidate for public office," he said clearly. And I give him much mana; he didn't shout, but he talked right over me. "And as such I have an obligation —"

But I out-yelled him anyway. "Candidate! You're a candidate right up to till the minute I tell the voters you're a nut, Connick. And then you're dead! And I will tell them, I promise, if —"

I didn't get a chance to finish that sentence, because all three of Connick's kids were diving at me, his own two and the other one. They sent papers flying off Haber's desk and smashed his sand-crystal decanter; but they didn't get to my throat, where they clearly were aimed, because Connick and Timmy Brown dragged them back. Not easily.

I allowed myself a sneer. "And what does that prove? Your kids like you, I admit — even the one from Mars. The one that Knafti's people used for vivisection — that Knafti himself worked over, likely as not. Nice picture, right? Your bug-buddy there, killing babies, destroying kids . . . or didn't you know that Knafti himself was one of the boss bugs on the baby-killing project?"

Timmy Brown shrieked wildly, "You don't know what you are do*ing*. It was not Knafti's fault at *all!*" His ashen face was haggard, his rotten teeth bared in a grimace. And he was weeping.

If you apply heat to a single molecule it will take off like a tom with a spark under his tail, but you cannot say where it will go. If you heat a dozen molecules they will fling out in all directions, but you still do not know which directions they will be. If, however, you heat a few billion, about as many as are in a thimble of dilute gas, you know where they will go: they will expand. Mass action. You can't tell what a single molecule may do — call it the molecule's free will, if you like — but masses obey mass laws. Masses of anything; even so small a mass as the growling troop that confronted me in Haber's office. I

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let them yell, and all the yelling was at me. Even Candace was showing the frown and the darkening of the eyes and the working of the lips, although she watched me as silently and steadily as ever.

Connick brought it to a head: "All *right,* everybody," he yelled, "now listen to me! Let's get this thing straightened out!"

He stood up, a child gripped by each elbow and the third, the youngest, trapped between him and the door. He looked at me with such loathing that I could feel it — and didn't like it, either, although it was no more than I had expected, and he said: "It's true. Sammy, here, was one of the kids from Mars. Maybe that has made me think things I shouldn't have thought — he's my kid now, and when I think of those stinkbugs cutting —"

He stopped himself and turned to Knafti. "Well, I see something. A man who would do a thing like that would be a fiend. I'd cut his heart out with my bare hands. But you aren't a man."

Grimly he let go of the kids and strode toward Knafti. "I can't forgive you. God help me, it isn't possible. But I can't blame you — exactly — any more than I can blame lightning for striking my house. I think I was wrong. Maybe I'm wrong now. But — I don't know what you people do — I'd like to shake your hand. Or whatever the hell it is you've got there. I've been thinking of you as a perverted murderer and a filthy animal, but I'll tell you right now, I'd rather work together with you — for your base, for peace, for whatever we can get together on — than with some human beings in this room!"

I didn't stay to watch the tender scene that followed.

I didn't have to, since the cameras and tape recorders that the studio people had activated for me behind every one-way mirror in the room would be watching for me. I could only hope they had not missed a single word or scream, because I didn't think I could do that scene over again.

I opened the door quietly and left. And as I was going I caught the littlest Connick kid sneaking past me, headed for the 3-V set in the waiting room, and snaked out an arm to stop him. "Stinker!" he hissed. "Rat fink!"

"You may be right," I told him, "but go back and keep your father company. You're in on living history today."

"Nuts! I always watch *Dr. Zhivago* on Monday nights, and it's on in five minutes and —"

"Not tonight it isn't, son. You can hold that against me, too.

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We preempted the time for a different show entirely."

I escorted him back into the room, closed the door, picked up my coat and left.

Candace was waiting for me with the car. She was driving it herself.

"Will I make the nine-thirty flight?" I asked.

"Sure, Gunner." She steered onto the autotraffic lane, put the car on servo and dialed the scatport, then sat back and lit a cigarette for each of us. I took it and looked morosely out the window.

Down below us, on the slow-traffic level, we were passing a torchlight parade, with floats and glee clubs and free beer at the major pedestrian intersections. I opened the glove compartment and took out field glasses, looked through them —

"Oh, you don't have to check up, Gunner. I took care of it. They're all plugging the program."

"I see they are." Not only were the marchers carrying streamers that advertised our preempt show, that was now already beginning to be on the air, but the floats carried projection screens and amplifiers. You couldn't look anywhere in the procession without seeing Knafti, huge and hideous in his gold carapace, clutching the children and protecting them against the attack of that monster from another planet, me. The studio people had done a splendid job of splicing in no time at all. The whole scene was there on camera, as real as I had just lived it.

"Want to listen?" Candace fished out and passed me a hyperboloid long-hearer, but I didn't need it. I remembered what the voices would be saying. There would be Connick denouncing me. Timmy Brown denouncing me. The kids denouncing me, all of them. Colonel Peyroles, denouncing me; Commander Whitling, denouncing me; even Knafti — denouncing me. All that hate and only one target.

Me.

"Of course, Junior'll fire you. He'll have to, Gunner."

I said, "I need a vacation anyway." It wouldn't matter. Sooner or later, when the pressure was off, Junior would find a way to hire me back. Once the lawsuits had been settled. Once the armistice commission could finish its work. Once I could be put on the payroll inconspicuously, at an inconspicuous job in an inconspicuous outpost of the firm. With an inconspicuous future.

We slid over the top of a spiraling ramp and down into the

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parking bays of the scatport. "So long, honey," I said, "and Merry Christmas to you both."

"Oh, Gunner! I wish —"

But I knew what she really wished and I wouldn't let her finish. I said, "He's a nice fellow, Whitling. And you know? I'm not."

I didn't kiss her good-by.

The scatjet was ready for boarding. I fed my ticket into the check-in slot, got the green light as the turnstile clicked open, entered the plane and took a seat on the far side, by the window.

You can win any cause if you care to pay the price. All it takes is one human sacrifice.

By the time the scatjet began to roar, to quiver and to turn on its axis away from the terminal I had faced the fact that that price once and for all was paid. I saw Candace standing there on the roof of the loading dock, her skirts whipped by the backblast. She didn't wave to me, but she didn't go away as long as I could see her standing on the platform.

Then, of course, she would go back to her job and ultimately on Christmas morning to that nice guy at the hospital. Haber would stay in charge of his no-longer-important branch office. Connick would win his campaign. Knafti would transact his incomprehensible business with Earth; and if any of them ever thought of me again it would be with loathing, anger and contempt. But that is the way to win an election. You have to pay the price. It was just the breaks of the game that the price of this one was me.

—FREDERIK POHL

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Forgotten road to success in writing

By J. D. Ratcliff

I can't imagine why more beginners don't take the short road to publication — by writing magazine and newspaper articles.

I've made a good living for 25 years writing articles, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I've interviewed Nobel Prize winners and heads of state. I've covered stories from Basel to Bangkok to Buffalo.

It's a great life. No commuter trains to catch, no office routine. Whether I'm at home or abroad on assignment, I write from eight to noon every day — no more, no less. My afternoons are my own.

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